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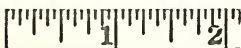
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The University of Chicago

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THE HISTORY OF THE OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH  
OF CHICAGO

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the Graduate School of Arts and Literature  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Church History  
in the Graduate Divinity School

Miles Mark Fisher

Chicago, Illinois

June, 1922.

1654



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## CHAPTER 1

1848-1863

In 1846, the Wood River Baptist Association of Illinois reported "14 churches, 9 preachers, 6 licentiates, and 243 members, scattered over the State from Shawneetown to Galena and Chicago."<sup>1</sup> From this Statement it might be inferred that there was a Negro Baptist church in Chicago in 1848. Moreover, the inference seems all the more probable from a statement from Dr. John Mason Peck to Dr. David Benedict about the same time.

"The Colored Association," wrote Dr. Peck,<sup>2</sup> "extends into the three districts of the State. The oldest and most active ones are in Madison and St. Clair counties; but they have churches, small for the most part, at Shawneetown, Wadalia, Jacksonville, Springfield, Chicago, and Galena."

The minutes of the Wood River Association make no specific reference to a church in Chicago before 1853 but it is evident that some of the residents of the city, who came mostly from New England, had such sympathy for their black neighbors that the atmosphere was at least healthful enough for such an organization to thrive sometime before that date. Especially does the anti-slavery history of the Tabernacle Baptist Church reveal this fact.<sup>3</sup>

1 Minutes Baptist General Association of Illinois, 1846, p.16

2 Benedict, A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World (1848), p.863.

3 The following resolution made a part of the church's application for membership in the Chicago Association in 1844: "Resolved. That slavery is a great sin in the sight of God, and while we view it as such, we will not invite to out Communion or pulpit those who advocate or justify from civil





Definite, potent, righteous attitudes of the Christian citizens of Chicago continued toward the Negro for a number of years. The Tabernacle Church was influencing markedly the Northern Baptist Association of Illinois<sup>1</sup> in the awakening of sympathy for the Negro. Besides severely denouncing the system of slavery in 1847,<sup>2</sup> 1848,<sup>3</sup> 1850,<sup>4</sup> 1851,<sup>5</sup> sending funds to the American Baptist Free Mission Society "for the purpose of aid in giving the Bible to the slave,"<sup>6</sup> and aiding the fugitive Negroes in Canada,<sup>7</sup> the association went so far in 1853<sup>8</sup> as to defy the law of returning Negroes in Illinois to slavery by declaring that "we protest against such enactments in the name of humanity, in the name of Christianity, and in the name of the supreme God, and declare to the world that we treat all such legislation as null and void - and declare that in the face of fines and imprisonment, we will 'obey God rather than man.'" .

policy or the Bible the principles or practice of slavery." Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. i, pp.319ff.

1 At a meeting of this association in June, 1846, it was voted to divide the territory of the association on a line running West through Washington Street, Chicago, to the western boundary of the association - the churches North of this line retained the name of the Northern Baptist Association of Illinois, changed to the Chicago Baptist Association in 1847, and those South called themselves the Fox River Baptist Association. Minutes Chicago Baptist Association, 1847, p.8; *ibid* 1912, p.71.

- 2 *Ibid*, 1847, p.7.
- 3 *Ibid*, 1848, p.3.
- 4 *Ibid*, 1850, p.5.
- 5 *Ibid*, 1851, p.12.
- 6 *Ibid*, 1847, p.7; etc.
- 7 *Ibid*, 1848, p.3.
- 8 *Ibid*, 1853, p.6.



Nor was that all. Throughout the early period of the development of Chicago churches, it was amply demonstrated that the cause of the Negro had a "strong claim on the prayers and contributions" of the white Baptists.

The civilians also kept pace with the righteous indignation of the church. In June, 1851, they were wild with excitement because a Negro resident of Chicago was forcibly arrested and claimed as Moses Johnson, a fugitive slave belonging to a Missourian. Special deputies were sworn in and five companies of militia mustered out to prevent any violence from the mob which surrounded the trial hall and which was planning to rescue the alleged fugitive if the case went against him. The prisoner was, however, discharged and the enthusiasm of the crowd found an outlet in the celebration of his release.<sup>1</sup>

With such pronounced sentiment abroad, it must have been good for the 323 Negroes<sup>2</sup> to live in Chicago. Few of them were connected with the Quinn Chapel, A.M.E. Church, organized in 1847.<sup>3</sup> The Baptists began to organize.

Tradition has it that John Larnon and Samuel McCoy, who still lives, met April 6, 1850, in the home of Sallie Jackson and organized the Xenia Baptist Church. These three, it is said, continued their worship for three years, when, with Annie Simpson,<sup>4</sup> they were formally organized into the Zoar Baptist Church. Certainly the facts in the case do not warrant 1850 as a possible date for the forerunner of the Olivet Church. If such a church had been in existence it seems that

1 Centennial History of Illinois, vol.iii, p.228.

2 United States Census, 1850, p.705.

3 Chicago Directory, 1865-66, appendix p.xxxi.

4 Souvenir Program Olivet Baptist Church, 1915, pp.4f.



it would have at least become known to the friends of the Negro. It is highly probable that Xenia and Zoar are linguistically confused and that the two names represent only one organization. Furthermore, if the Xenia (Zoar) Church had been organized in 1850, it would not have been necessary to re-organize it in 1853, nor would 1853 have been carved above the entrance of the Olivet Church (27th and Dearborn Streets) in 1898. Certainly the account of the founding of the Church in 1853 would have been corrected in the periodicals of the same age per chance it was incorrect.<sup>1</sup> We may be sure, therefore, that the Zoar Baptist Church was organized in 1853.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. Robert J. Robinson, sometimes Moderator of the Wood River Baptist Association,<sup>3</sup> pastor of the Union Baptist Church, Alton, Illinois,<sup>4</sup> and in 1853 the General Agent of the Wood River Association, says<sup>5</sup> in his report for that year, "I have organized one church in the city of Chicago."

This organization was none other than the Zoar Baptist Church which was formed of eleven members in April, 1853,<sup>6</sup> probably on the 6th as tradition has it. During that year,

1 Chicago Directory 1856-57, appendix p.xxv; *ibid*, 1857-58, appendix p.474; *ibid*, 1859-60, appendix p.40; *ibid*, Cf. the Standard, July 12, 1877; *ibid*, July 19, 1877; *ibid*, May 30 1878; *ibid*, November 1, 1883; *ibid*, May 15, 1890; *ibid*, January 11, 1894; *ibid*, Supplement, July 12, 1894; *ibid*, November 15, 1894.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1853, p.9; *ibid*, 1854, p.9; cf. the Standard, May 19, 1900.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1843, p.4; *ibid*, 1844, p.3; *ibid*, 1846, p.4.

4 *Ibid*, 1843, p.3; *ibid*, 1844, p.3; *ibid*, 1851, p.3; *ibid*, 1853, p.3; *ibid*, 1854, p.3.

5 *Ibid*, 1853, p.9.

6 *Ibid*, 1854, p.9.



the church contributed \$7.50 to the Wood River Association.<sup>1</sup>

It is most natural that Rev. Mr. Robinson was not the pastor of the church, as Andreas<sup>2</sup> incorrectly infers, since he was the minister of the Union Church at Alton.<sup>3</sup> Nor was he succeeded, as the same writer says,<sup>4</sup> in about a month by the Rev. H. H. Hawkins. The Christian Times, September 6, 1854, states that Rev. Mr. Hawkins was at that time the minister of the colored Baptist church in Chatham, Canada, West. He had just returned from Kentucky where he purchased the freedom of his sister, her husband and her child.<sup>5</sup>

The Zoar Church had no pastor for about two years. It was occasionally supplied by brethren of the Wood River Association who endeavored to keep the organization alive.<sup>6</sup> Yet, there were some additions to the Zoar membership. By August, 1854, two had been received by baptism and six by letter, making the membership nineteen,<sup>7</sup> when the church, through Brother William Johnson, made application for membership in the Wood River Association. "After satisfactory evidence was given of the soundness of her faith, she was unanimously received; and while one of Zion's songs was being sung, the right hand of fellowship was given to her delegate"<sup>8</sup> who took an active part in the deliberations of the association.<sup>9</sup>

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1853, p.11.

2 History of Chicago, vol. 1, p.323.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1854, p.3.

4 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.323.

5 Quoted from the Mich. Chr. Her.

6 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1853, p.9; *ibid*, 1854, p.5.

7 *Ibid*, p.3.

8 *Ibid*, pp.3f.

9 *Ibid*, pp.4, 7. The Wood River Baptist Association organized in 1838, is the second oldest Negro association in America.





The Zoar Church was greatly helped through the struggle it was having for existence by the frequent visits from the ministers of the Association. As a matter of fact, many of the ministers carried out the policy of the association in visiting each church and station named in the minutes and reporting their visits to the Association.<sup>1</sup>

One can judge of the humbleness of the meeting house and the circumstances of the members when the fact is stated that the Zoar Church was struggling to pay \$150 a year rent for their place of worship.<sup>2</sup> Still some progress was being made, for by August, 1856, the membership of the church numbered 56.<sup>3</sup>

The statement of Andreas<sup>4</sup> that the Rev. D. G. Lett was pastor of the Zoar Church in 1855 or 1856 must be disregarded. By August, 1856, the Rev. H. H. Hawkins had been called to the pastorate of the Zoar Church,<sup>5</sup> and from the progress that the institution was making it is to be supposed that he came some months earlier. Rev. Mr. Hawkins served the Association in several capacities<sup>6</sup> and was one of the preachers at the fourth annual session of the Western Colored Baptist Convention<sup>7</sup> which met at Belleville, October 17, 1856.<sup>8</sup> This convention was composed of colored people mostly of the State of Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri,<sup>9</sup> who had planned to help the desti-

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1854, p.5.

2 Ibid, p.9.

3 Ibid, 1856, p.3.

4 History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

5 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1856, p.3.  
Chicago Directory, 1856-57, an endix p.xxxv.

6 Ibid, pp.4, 6, 7; ibid, 1857, pp.3, 6.

7 The Christian Times, October 20, 1853.

8 Ibid, October 29, 1856.

9 Ibid, October 20, 1853.



tute churches of their districts.<sup>1</sup>

To Rev. Mr. Hawkins belongs the distinction of first marshalling the Zoar congregation for real Christian service. The Christian Times, March 6, 1857, has this to say of the church:

The election of officers in the Zoar Baptist Church, Chicago, took place December 30th, 1856, and resulted in the election of Brn. F. Bowen, J. Johnson, and J. H. Marshall, as Deacons; Wm. Johnson as clerk; John Jones as Treasurer; and Wm. Johnson, H. Bradford, and H. O. Wagoner, as trustees.

Brn. H. H. Hawkins, the pastor, has been duly authorized to solicit aid for this church, from all who may feel favorable to the upbuilding of the cause of Christ.

Wm. Johnson, ch. clerk.

Chicago, March 3rd, 1857.

The Zoar congregation was developing into a well rounded church. Preaching services were carried on Sundays in the morning, and at three and seven-thirty P.M. The Sunday School was at the close of the morning worship; prayer meeting was on Wednesday evening.<sup>2</sup> The Zoar Church was considered as one of the most important factors in the progress of the city Baptists. When the Union Park Baptist Church called nine churches together to recognize her as a regular Baptist church Saturday, February 7th, 1857, the Zoar congregation was included and responded.<sup>3</sup>

At that time, the Zoar Church was struggling hard to pay for a lot which they had recently purchased. They had the good will of their sister churches and of the Christian Times.

1 The Christian Times, October 20, 1853; *ibid*, October 29th, 1856.

2 *Ibid*, July 10, 1857; *ibid*, July 17th, 1857; *ibid*, July 22, 1857.

3 *Ibid*, February 11, 1857.



The appeal of that paper for September 2, 1857, throws so much light on the history of the Zoar Church that it is worthy to be given in detail:

Rev. H. Hawkins, pastor of the Zoar (colored) Baptist Church in this city is now in the country soliciting aid for his brethren in paying for their church lot (located on the corner of Harrison and Griswold Streets).<sup>1</sup> We feel so much interest in his success that we volunteer the statement of a few facts which may commend his object beforehand to such churches as he may hereafter visit.

The colored Baptist church in this city is made up of very excellent and reliable material. Its leading male members are respected and successful business men, and fully capable of directing wisely the financial affairs of the church. A good state of religious feeling exists among them and their pastor is an efficient and useful man. Some two years since, with the assistance of other churches, a small house of worship was built upon a leased lot (corner of Buffalo and Taylor Streets).<sup>2</sup> It becoming necessary for the church to have a lot of its own, one was purchased with a desirable location for the sum of \$5,000, to be paid in four annual installments. To meet the first payment \$1,250 were borrowed, and a mortgage given in security upon the property of one of the brethren. In January this must be paid, together with the second payment, and the interest upon both, making about \$2,800. The church is small, and though, as intimated above, some of its male members are tolerably prosperous in their business, they are not able to assume the whole burden of these payments. Their appeal to the churches is justified by these facts, and by the additional one that while a new location was demanded, a suitable lot could not be obtained as property is held in this city, at a less sum than they have undertaken to pay. We trust that Bro. Hawkins will be successful in his effort to interest the churches of this State in the object of his visit among them.

Money was forthcoming and the people were thus able to turn attention to other important issues of the day. The last mention made of Rev. Mr. Hawkins by the sources is in the fall of 1857 and it is to be supposed that he resigned the church after that, since the Rev. David G. Lett was the pastor of the Zoar Church in the following year.<sup>3</sup> It was thus while Mr.

1 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

2 Ibid, p.323.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1858, p.3.  
Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.323.



Lett was pastor<sup>1</sup> that a mass meeting of the colored citizens of Chicago was held at the A.M.E. Church (Quinn Chapel) on Jackson Street, August 10, 1858, to discuss emigrating from the country and colonizing. After much debate and a motion to emigrate had received only one favorable vote, Mr. H. O. Wagoner of the Zoar Church, one of the three secretaries of the meeting, said in his motion that Negroes "have already planted our trees in the American soil, and by the help of God we mean to repose under the shade thereof."<sup>2</sup> These were trying times for the black man in Illinois and he had to declare himself as well as to depend upon the white press, especially the Christian Times,<sup>3</sup> which spoke in no uncertain terms of the Negro as "a man who must not be denied his prerogatives."

In spite of the deserved attitude of white and colored toward the Negro, some few of the recent immigrants from the South were neither good citizens nor useful church members. The Zoar Church had a few of his class. They had brought with them their own ideas of church worship and government which retarded the progress of the Zoar congregation.

One of the last acts of Rev. Mr. Hawkins was to exclude 21 members of the church thereby reducing the membership in 1857 to 57.<sup>4</sup> Pastor Lett was certainly not wise when he restored these members to full fellowship the following year.<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Mr. Lett seemed just a little too anxious to have his church the leading one of the Wood River Association. He

1 He took no conspicuous part in the meeting now to be mentioned.

2 Cf. Appendix A.

3 Cf. the issues for August 8 and 15, 1860.

4 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1857, p.3.

5 Ibid, 1858, p.3.





succeeded in this,<sup>1</sup> in being twice elected Moderator of the Wood River Baptist Association<sup>2</sup> which adopted a splendid anti-slavery, temperance, missionary and educational program during his administration,<sup>3</sup> and was, in fact, a leading character among the Baptists of Illinois.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Pastor Lett had paved the way for his resignation by his unwise handling of cases of church discipline.

Probably such a condition as the following had arisen in the Zoar Church, for at the meeting of the Association, Elder Lett took the negative in the discussion of the following query which he laid before the Association:<sup>5</sup>

Query. - If a slave man is married to a slave woman, and should they be separated by the master, or by making their escape into a free State, and marry another, is he or she guilty of bigamy?

The question was finally answered by a resolution of the Rev. R. J. Robinson which was amended by Pastor Lett to read as follows:

Resolved, That we believe the marriage of slaves to be morally binding, yet we do not believe it to be legal. We would, however, caution the churches to look well into the matter before they act.

This resolution was carried<sup>6</sup> but it is not too much to say that Rev. Mr. Lett was not influential enough to get many of the Zoar people to think as he did. At the meeting of the Association in 1859, the Piassa Church inquired why some churches had quit practising footwashing. A "spirited and warm

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1858, p.3; *ibid*, 1859, p.4.

2. *Ibid*, 1858, p.4; *ibid*, 1859, p.4.

3 *Ibid*, 1859, pp.6ff.

4 *Ibid*, 1858, pp.5, 7.

5 *Ibid*, p.6.

6 *Ibid*, p.6.



discussion" ensued after which the Association resolved by a vote of 5 yeas against 3 nays to practise footwashing. It is interesting to note that Isham Johnson, a delegate from the Zoar Church voted yea on this question and that Rev. Mr. Lett voted nay.<sup>1</sup>

This was while the Association was meeting with the Zoar Church<sup>2</sup> but Rev. Mr. Lett was not the pastor, although the Moderator of the Association. He had remained with the Zoar Church only about seven months after which the pulpit was filled by two or three members "with an occasional sermon by their former minister"<sup>3</sup> It is perfectly clear, then, also that one of the causes of his resignation was the fact that some of the members believed in footwashing while the pastor held a contrary view. The letter of the Zoar Church to the Association expresses what was going on during this period of stress and storm. "Many roots of bitterness have sprung up among the brethren, which has marred their peace and hindered the work of God, and scattered the members".<sup>4</sup> The membership decreased from 92 in 1856<sup>5</sup> to 73 in 1859.<sup>6</sup>

At the meeting of the Association in August, 1860, the Zoar Church reported 2 received by baptism, 9 by letter, and 15 by restoration; 15 excluded, 2 dismissed by letter and one by death.<sup>7</sup> The membership was 90. This progress was ac-

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1858, p.11.

2 Ibid, 1859.

3 Ibid, p.15.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, 1858, p.3.

6 Ibid, 1859, p.4.

7 Ibid, 1860, p.4.



complished without a pastor, the church being supplied only for a part of the year by the Rev. Edward S. Woodson.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this seeming progress, an unhappy event had taken place in March. 35 or 40 members were organized into the Mount Zion Baptist Church,<sup>2</sup> which, according to Andreas,<sup>3</sup> leased and worshipped in a frame store building standing on Clark Street, near Harrison Street.

The same writer says,<sup>4</sup> that the Rev. H. H. White was the first pastor of the Mount Zion Church, but only the following facts were given when the church represented in the Fox River Baptist Association:

After some delay, (we) have at length obtained the services of Elder J. F. Boulden, as our pastor. Our hopes, which were bright, have been blasted by that infamous slave system. We ask help, being the poorest of the poor.<sup>5</sup>

The Church reported received 2 by baptism and 33 by letter, making a total of 40 members.<sup>6</sup> But by September, the membership had reached 68.<sup>7</sup> J. James was clerk, and Jesse Freeman Boulden, pastor.

Rev. Mr. Boulden was born in Delaware, October 8, 1820. He received his education in the public schools of Delaware and in the Quaker Schools of Philadelphia. He was ordained in 1854 to take charge of the Union Baptist Church, Philadelphia, from which he was called to the Mount Zion Church of Chicago. Rev. Mr. Boulden had come to Chicago purposely to

- 1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1860, p.10.
- 2 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1861, pp.16, 21
- 3 History of Chicago, vol.1, p.323.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1861, p.16.
- 6 Ibid, p.21.
- 7 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1861, p.44.



unite the two churches.<sup>1</sup> The less than a thousand Negroes<sup>2</sup> in Chicago could hardly support four churches ( two Methodist and two Baptist ).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there was no need of the Zoar and the Mount Zion Churches being alienated from each other; both were struggling and weak.<sup>4</sup>

Thereupon, when the Rev. Mr. Tensbury, pastor of the Zoar Church, left and went back to Canada,<sup>5</sup> the opportunity presented itself to Rev. Mr. Boulden to try to harmonize whatever grievances there had existed between the two bodies. Neither organization would unite under the name of the other and so both names, Zoar and Mt. Zion, were dropped and the people mutually agreed to call themselves the Olivet Baptist Church. This union took place December 22, 1861,<sup>6</sup> in the Edina Place Baptist Church.<sup>7</sup>

Rev. Mr. Boulden believed in organization and especially in the Fox River Baptist Association<sup>8</sup> - a body that had avowed perseveringly to lift up its voice and use its influence against the "Black Laws" of Illinois,<sup>9</sup> and that deeply sym-

1 Thompson, History of the Negro Baptists of Mississippi pp. 559ff.

2 There were 955 Negroes and 106,305 white residents in Chicago according to the U.S. Census, 1860, p.90.

3 The Mt. Zion and Zoar Baptist Churches and the Quinn Chapel and Bethel (organized 1861) A. F. M. Churches. Cf. Chicago Directory, 1865-6, appendix, p. xxxi.

4 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1863, p.17.

5 This is the statement of Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324, and since the Olivet Church did not represent in the Wood River Association in 1861 and 1862 (Minutes, pp.2 and 3 respectively), we must rely on it.

6 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, p.34; Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1862, p.17; the Christian Times, January 15, 1862; compare Andreas, vol.1, p.324.

7 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

8 Olivet did not represent in the Wood River Association in 1862.

9 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1855, p.10.





pathized with the Negro immigrants to Kansas<sup>1</sup> and that often re-affirmed its disapproval of the system of American slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Under such wholesome influence, Olivet "enjoyed peace and harmony," preaching service thrice daily on the Sabbath, prayer meetings Wednesday and Friday, a flourishing Sunday school,<sup>3</sup> and was embarrassed only in money matters which compelled them to ask sister churches for aid.<sup>4</sup> By June, 1862, William Hiram, clerk, reported that 3 had been received by baptism, 8 by letter, 7 by Christian experience and 2 excluded. The membership was 132.<sup>5</sup> The Sunday school did not have a regularly elected superintendent but had 8 teachers and 30 scholars. There were 128 volumes in the Sunday school library,<sup>6</sup> some of which had been donated by the American Baptist Publication Society.<sup>7</sup>

The Olivet people continued, until 1865, to worship in the building at the corner of Harrison and Griswold Streets, which was formerly owned by the Zoar Church.<sup>8</sup> Rev. Mr. Boulden remained with the church until the early part of 1863<sup>9</sup> and then went South to help in the religious, educational and political uplift of the Negro.<sup>10</sup>

1 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1856, p.14.

2 Ibid, 1860, p.II; ibid, 1861, p.12; ibid, 1862, p.II; ibid, 1863, p.14.

3 The Christian Times, April 16, 1862; ibid, June 11, 1862; ibid, September 3, 1862; ibid, November 12, 1862; ibid, December 31, 1862; ibid, February 11, 1863.

4 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1862, p.17.

5 Ibid, p.20.

6 Ibid, p.22; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1862, p.37.

7 The Christian Times, March 19, 1862.

8 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

9 The Christian Times, February 11, 1863.

10 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, pp.5, 7; Thompson, History of the Negro Baptists of Mississippi, p.560; Woodson, The History of the Negro Church, pp.227f.



## CHAPTER II

1863 -1882

For some months there was no pastor to lead the 132 members of the Olivet Church. But in June, 1863, the Rev. Mr. Richard De Baptiste was called to take charge.<sup>1</sup> One of the first things that Rev. Mr. De Baptiste did was to put the Baptist church in Chicago again into the Wood River Association, at the twenty-sixth annual meeting held at Jacksonville, 1864.<sup>2</sup> It appears that some one without authority had represented the church in the Association in 1863, but not until 1864 was it "motioned to receive Olivet in full fellowship" and the hand of fellowship given to her representative, the Rev. Richard De Baptiste,<sup>3</sup> who, from the first, took an active part in the Association serving as moderator, pro. tem. and corresponding secretary.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Mr. De Baptiste had no scruples about any of the peculiar tenets of that body. He at least countenanced foot-washing, if, indeed, he did not practise it. In respect to this matter, the Association in 1861<sup>5</sup> "Resolved. To advise the churches to strictly attend to all these duties according to the Lord's command." The Association adopted the practice in 1862<sup>6</sup> and again resolved in 1864<sup>7</sup> "That this Association counsel and advise the churches to take up this Cross, and its shame despise. Jesus says 'If ye know these things, happy

1 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. i. p. 324.

2 Minutes Wood River Association, 1864, p. 3; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1864, p. 39.

3 Minutes Wood River Association, 1864, p. 3.

4 Ibid, pp. 3, 4, 5f, 7, 13f.

5 Ibid, 1861, p. 4.

6 Ibid, 1862, p. 5.

7 Ibid, 1864, p. 8.



are ye if ye do them.'"

Such a practice did not mean in that day that Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was irregular in his practice of Baptist principles for he was recognized as a minister in good standing by both colored and white.

His church continued a member of the Fox River Association and at the annual meeting in June was glad to report a revival in her midst.<sup>1</sup> The influx of Negroes to Chicago had meant much to the church and the pastor and members were anxious that the sister churches help them in securing another house of worship.<sup>2</sup>

The help did come. On February 15, 1864, the First Baptist Church voted to sell its meeting house on the corner of La Salle and Washington Streets because the location was in the heart of the trade district. The price set was \$165,000 and not less than one third of that amount was voted to aid the other Baptist churches in the city while the other amount was to be used in erecting another building on Wabash Avenue. Andreas says that Olivet received \$5,000 by this arrangement.<sup>3</sup>

Even in the effort to build an adequate meeting house for the scores of Negroes coming North, Olivet was none the less active in joining other churches in the North and South in providing means of uplift for Negroes of other districts especially in the South where many of the newly enfranchised race would never breathe free air.<sup>4</sup> In 1863, there had been

1 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1864, p.16.

2 Ibid. For the benefit of the new comers, the church operated a day and evening school. In 1865 there were 2 teachers and 40 pupils enrolled. Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, p.34.

3 History of Chicago, vol.ii, p.434.

4 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1861, pp.10f.



no meeting of the Western Colored Baptist Convention for four years and the plan to revive it was considered by some practically hopeless.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Olivet<sup>2</sup> met with 24 other churches<sup>3</sup> and representatives of the Wood River Baptist Association of Illinois, the Indiana Baptist Association and the First Colored Missionary Association of Tennessee, at St. Louis, Missouri, May 24-30, 1865, and held the first annual meeting of the Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention. The Rev. William P. Newman, a returned missionary from Haiti and Jamaica under the American Baptist Free Mission Society,<sup>4</sup> and then of Cincinnati, Ohio, was the President;<sup>5</sup> Pastor De Baptiste, the Corresponding Secretary.<sup>6</sup>

Article 2 of the constitution said:<sup>7</sup>

The object of this Convention shall be, first, to supply as far as its means will allow, destitute regions with missionaries; second, to promote the educational interest of the destitute.

The financial committee's report shows that Olivet's contribution of \$15 was only beaten by the Eighth Street Baptist Church of St. Louis, which contributed \$33, and equaled by the Second Church of Indianapolis and the Rose Hill Church of Natchez.<sup>8</sup>

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1863, p. 8.

2 Her delegates were Pastor De Baptiste, James C. Carey, Isham Johnson, R. L. Moss and William Johnson. Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, p. 5.

3 1 from Cincinnati, 3 St. Louis, 5 Illinois, 1 Ky., 1 Memphis, 1 Helena, Arkansas, 1 Indianapolis, 1 Nashville, 7 Louisiane, 2 Natchez, and 1 Jefferson City, Missouri. Ibid.

4 Fisher, Negro Baptists and Foreign Missions, pp. 24-26, 67-69.

5 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, pp. 5f.

6 Ibid, p. 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, p. 20.





Pastor De Baptiste was extremely active in this Convention, serving on every important committee.<sup>1</sup> He recommended that the brethren read the Christian Times, and that the Anglo African, published in New York City, be circulated among the brethren in addition to the Colored Tennessean.<sup>2</sup>

Probably the aim of Rev. Mr. De Baptiste in advocating the Anglo African was to acquaint the brethren of the Northwest and South with the activities of the New England Baptists. This seems all the more evident from the fact that at the second meeting of the convention at Nashville, Secretary De Baptiste was placed on the "Committee of union of missionary bodies."<sup>3</sup> The "missionary bodies" included none other than the American Baptist Missionary Convention founded in New England in 1840 and the Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention which were united to form the Consolidated American Baptist Convention in 1866.<sup>4</sup>

For the second meeting of the Convention, however, Pastor De Baptiste continued to take an active part in the deliberations.<sup>5</sup> He again represented the Wood River Baptist Association of which he was the secretary.<sup>6</sup> Of the 45 churches which had been reached by the announcement of the meeting mentioned by Elder De Baptiste in the Christian Times and Witness April 19, 1866, no one of them approached Olivet by \$100 in her contribution to home missions. \$1,150.69 was collected

1 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1865, pp.5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21.

2 Ibid, p.20.

3 Ibid, 1866, p.24.

4 The American Baptist Year Book, 1871, p.26; Jordan, Up the Ladder in Missions, p.18.

5 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1866, p.20.

6 Ibid, 1865, p.5; ibid, 1866, pp.6, 36.



for this purpose and Olivet gave \$279.39 of that amount.<sup>1</sup> No agent was needed to come to her and solicit the amount either.<sup>2</sup> Of the \$552 contributed to other causes, Olivet gave \$201.<sup>3</sup>

This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that the church was struggling under a heavy debt. Evidently it is a truism that when the spiritual side of the church is first all things are added thereto. Olivet is illustrative of this utterance from the Sermon on the Mount.

A revival was begun in the late winter of 1866 and by spring, 86 had been received - 71 by baptism.<sup>4</sup>

By this time the congregation had outgrown the old Zoar meeting house, whose seating capacity was only 250,<sup>5</sup> but which was used until 1865 and the people, says Andreas,<sup>6</sup> met in Witkosky Hall on the northwest corner of Monroe and Clark Streets. The congregation had already begun to erect a new place of worship<sup>7</sup> and had appealed to the Fox River Association for aid. In cash and pledges, the congregation raised \$6,500 and needed about \$4,500 more to meet their contracts.<sup>8</sup> By the time the corner stone was laid only \$4,500 in cash had been received on the contracts already amounting to \$9,000. However, July 4th, 1866, was the day set for the laying of the corner stone. In the afternoon, the exercises commenced with prayers by the Rev. J. A. Nash of Des Moines, Iowa. Then

1 Minutes Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, 1866, p.34.

2 Ibid, p.18.

3 Ibid, p.34.

4 Christian Times and Witness, February 1, 1866; *ibid*, March 8, 1866; *ibid*, April 12, 1866.

5 Chicago Directory, 1863-4, appendix p.xxiv; *ibid*, 1865-6, appendix p.xxvii; *ibid*, 1866, 811.

6 History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

7 The lot cost \$2950. Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1865, p.18.

8 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1866, p.28.



followed a historical sketch of the church by Pastor De Baptiste, brief complimentary and advisory talks by Dr. Pharellus Church of New York, the Rev. E. G. Taylor of Union Park Church and Mr. John Jones, the wealthiest colored citizen of Chicago. When the corner stone was put in place, a metal box was deposited in it containing a copy of the Bible, a facsimile copy of the Emancipation Proclamation and copies of the Christian Times and Witness, the American Baptist, the Citizen and the Tennessean. The concluding prayer was offered by Rev. Mr. Wilson.<sup>1</sup>

This was a momentous event for the Olivet Baptist Church and, as a matter of fact, for the Negro Baptists of Chicago. There is no doubt that because of the progress that Olivet was making, during the same month, the 22 colored members of the Union Park Church, on the West Side, asked for and received their letters of dismission with a view of effecting a separate organization.<sup>2</sup> They were encouraged in their endeavor<sup>3</sup> and in August, with two others, were constituted into the Calvary Baptist Church. They had no pastor, being supplied mostly by Rev. A. Wait (white) and occasionally by the pastor of the Union Park Church. Their services were held Sunday afternoon in the lecture room of the Union Park Church and in the evening at the home of one of the members.<sup>4</sup>

In 1867, Calvary church was received into the Fox River<sup>5</sup> and Wood River Associations<sup>6</sup> and by the late winter of the

1 Christian Times and Witness, July 12, 1866.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, July 19, 1866.

4 Minutes Fox River Association, 1867, pp.6, 21.

5 Ibid, p.9.

6 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1867, p.13.



next year, the name was changed to the Providence Baptist Church.<sup>1</sup> On invitation from Olivet, a council of pastors and other brethren from the churches of the city met in the lecture room of the Olivet Church, February 13, and examined Hiliard Evans for the ministry at Providence. He was ordained the following Thursday, Rev. Mr. De Baptiste delivering the charge to the pastor of the second colored church in Chicago.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the influence of the Olivet Church at the beginning of the period of reconstruction - reconstruction not only in the South but in the North. Affairs in Chicago and Illinois took a new turn when Rev. Mr. De Baptiste came. This is evident from the minutes of the Wood River Association. The Union Church, Alton, which had enjoyed the distinction of being printed first on the list of churches in the Association since 1850 dropped to second place and the Olivet Church was

1 The Standard, February 27, 1868.

2 Ibid. By the meeting of the Fox River Association, a house of worship costing \$1,200 had been built. Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1868, p.19. It is evident that the statement of Cathcart, Baptist Encyclopaedia, vol.1, p. 230, that the Providence Church began in 1871 is erroneous. Without any special effort to collect data respecting her other pastors, the following information has come to the attention of the writer:

		Members	S.S.
1868-1869	H. Evans	31	
1870	A. C. Johns	35	
1871-1872	J. W. Hall	46-52	
1873-1876	T. L. Johnson	85-96	
1877-1879	J. P. Johnson	83	
1880-1886	J. W. Polk	70-98	
1886-1888	W. H. Harrison	108	
1888-1892	T. L. Johnson	125	
1892-1894 (?)	J. E. Jackson		
1894-1895	A. W. Newsome		
1895	B. Hillman	125-278	
1896-1906	A. L. Harris	271-319	132
1907-1909	R. L. Darden	400-452	180
1915	S. L. M. Francis		
1922	B. J. Prince		

Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1866-1887; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1868-1921. The Standard, 1870-1900.





placed first. The printing of the minutes was taken from Alton to Chicago, and they were arranged better and differently and printed after the model of those of the Fox River Baptist Association. These facts were not invariable but they show the tremendous influence of Olivet and her pastor and that the leadership of Olivet carried with it the leadership of the Baptists of the State of Illinois.

Pastor De Baptiste served almost in every important capacity<sup>1</sup> in the Association - sometimes Moderator<sup>2</sup> and Correspondent Secretary almost continuously.<sup>3</sup> The Association met three times at his church.<sup>4</sup> The pastor of Olivet was one of the vice presidents from Illinois of the American Baptist Free Mission Society in 1866<sup>5</sup> and was enrolled a member of the Ministers Institute that was held at the University of Chicago, in July of that year.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Mr. De Baptiste had garnered for himself, a reputation that was bound to last. He was one of the three Negroes<sup>7</sup> who addressed the mass meeting of the American Baptist Home Mission Society at its annual gathering in Chicago, May 26, 1867. He corroborated the view of the other brethren who endorsed the National Theological Institute (now Roger Williams

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1866, pp.12, 16; *ibid.* 1870, p.11.

2 *Ibid.* 1876, p.3; *ibid.* 1881, p.2.

3 Christian Times and Witness, August 30, 1866; the Standard, September 30, 1880; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1864, p.4; *ibid.* 1867, p.9; *ibid.* 1868, p.8; *ibid.* 1871, p.7; *ibid.* 1877, p.1. *ibid.* 1879, p.1; *ibid.* 1880, p.2; *ibid.* 1881, p.2; *ibid.* 1882, p.2; etc.

4 *Ibid.* 1865, p.14; *ibid.* 1866; *ibid.* 1872; *ibid.* 1881; Christian Times and Witness, August 23 and August 30, 1866.

5 Minutes American Baptist Free Mission Society, 1866, p.2.

6 Christian Times and Witness, July 19, 1866.

7 T. L. Grimes, Boston, and William Dixon, Richmond, were the other two. Rev. Mr. Dixon was made a member of the executive board. *Ibid.* May 30, 1867; *ibid.* June 6, 1867.



University), Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup>

All along the church was adding new members especially by baptism. A revival seems to have broken out in March. At least twenty-five persons were immersed by the second Sunday in April.<sup>2</sup> The most remarkable conversion of the season was that of Sarah Harris, one hundred fifteen years old, who had children and their families consisting of grand-children, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren all members of Olivet. She gave evidence of sound conversion and requested baptism. Sister Harris was indeed an extraordinary woman for her age. She moved with ease and without assistance, threaded a needle readily, sewed for hours at a time, conversed freely and intelligently, and when relating her experience to the church spoke loud enough to be heard in every part of the house.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the revival was ended the new church house was completed and preparations for the dedication made. The Standard, April 9, 1868, invited the entire brotherhood to attend "and see what has been accomplished, and hear how it has been accomplished. Our Baptist pastors will much oblige us by noticing this from their pulpits next Sabbath, and also by their presence on Thursday evening, the 16th inst., at 7½ o'clock."

The account of the dedicatory services is so full of historical data that it is worthy to be given here in its entirety

1 Christian Times and Witness, May 30, 1867; *ibid* June 6, 1867.

2 The Standard, March 12, 1868; *ibid*, March 19, 1868; *ibid*, March 26, 1868; *ibid*, April 9, 1868.

3 *Ibid*, March 26, 1868.



It said:

Our brethren of the Olivet Baptist Church have at length completed their new and commodious house of worship. It is located on the east side of Fourth Avenue, about midway between Polk and Taylor streets. The edifice is of brick, neatly, plainly, and substantially built, 42 feet wide and 80 feet in length. On the lower, or basement floor, there is a large lecture-room for Sunday School and other purposes, and two smaller rooms, 18 by 18, for Bible classes, etc., with ten feet ceiling. The audience room is 68 by 40, with 24 feet ceilings and a gallery across the west end, and will seat from 600 to 800. The finishing is neat, appropriate and comfortable, and the whole interior presents an attractive appearance.

The dedication services were held on Thursday evening of last week (April 16), and commenced with a prayer by Rev. J. C. Graves. After the conclusion of the preliminary exercises, the esteemed pastor of the church, Rev. R. De Baptiste, as chairman of the building committee, submitted a historical sketch of the church, and of the building enterprise. In 1863 there were but about one hundred members on the rolls of the church, and they were worshipping in a small wooden building on leased land, on the corner of Harrison and Griswold streets. The membership doubled in a year, after the present pastor took charge, and they soon found it much too small. In the spring of 1864 a subscription was opened, and by August a sufficient amount had been raised to purchase their present lot, at a cost of \$3,000. On the 22nd of December the lecture-room was occupied for Divine service. And now the church enters a completed house of worship, with a membership of 450. The house has cost \$14,185; furnishing, \$1,048. This, with the lots, makes a total of \$18,240.45. Of this, \$12,865.45 has been paid up to the day of dedication - all but \$3,175.85, by the congregation. Br. J. M. Van Osdel, with his accustomed liberality, gave \$450 in services as audited.

The dedicatory sermon was preached by Dr. Everts, from Psalm lxxxvii. 2: "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." At the close an appeal was made for contributions to meet the indebtedness of the church, which was responded to. Rev. H. H. White offered the prayer of dedication, and the services closed with a prayer by Rev. H. Evans.<sup>1</sup>

The subscription taken at this service covered about one half the amount of the indebtedness so that others had ample opportunity to contribute.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the church was overjoyed to report at the meeting of the Fox River Association

1 The Standard, April 23, 1868.

2 Ibid, April 30, 1868.



that there was only a debt of about \$3,000 remaining. J. Shipton kept the record of 460 members.<sup>1</sup> The whole event meant that Olivet took the lead among the colored churches of the city, outstripping the Quinn Chapel and Bethel A. M. E. Churches by 30 and 180 members respectively.<sup>2</sup>

From the time of the dedication of the new Olivet Church, Rev. Mr. De Baptiste became more than a local figure; he was a national character. In 1869 he was president of the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention.<sup>3</sup> He did not fail, however, to take an active part in the American Baptist Free Mission Society, the Illinois Baptist Sunday School Association,<sup>4</sup> the Wood River Baptist Association and the Fox River Baptist Association. In the last named Association, he was recommended, in 1867, by the Committee on Place and Preacher, as alternate to the Rev. J. B. Dibell, of Hadley Church, who was to preach the introductory sermon at the next session with the Union Church, Aurora.<sup>5</sup> Pastor De Baptiste served in 1868 on the Committee on Temperance<sup>6</sup> and was also elected preacher of the introductory sermon for the next session at Sandwich, Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

1 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1868, pp.6, 17, 19.

2 Chicago Directory, 1868-9, p.994.

3 Minutes American Baptist Free Mission Society, 1869, pp.11, 19f; American Baptist Year Book, 1870, p.22; he served this organization as president until 1872 and vice president from Illinois in 1876 and 1877. American Baptist Year Book, 1871, p.26; *ibid*, 1873, p.25; *ibid*, 1877, p.18; *ibid*, 1878, p.19.

4 Mr. De Baptiste was vice president from the Wood River Baptist Association from 1869-1872. Minutes Illinois Baptist Sunday School Association in Minutes Baptist General Association, 1869, p.3; *ibid*, 1870, p.92; 1871, p.69; 1872, p.56.

5 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1867, pp.6, 11.

6 *Ibid*, 1868, p.15.

7 *Ibid*, p.12.





The Moderator of the Association was absent from this meeting and so Rev. Mr. De Baptiste called the Association together (the rules of order providing that in the absence of the moderator the preacher of the introductory sermon should call the meeting to order). Then the Rev. Martin Boomer was chosen moderator, pro. tem. "After prayer by the moderator the introductory sermon was preached by Rev. R. De Baptiste, of Chicago, from 1st Cor. 1:23, 24, 'But we preach Christ crucified.'<sup>1</sup>

There was some talk at this meeting of re-distributing the churches of this Association and of the Chicago Baptist Association, but the matter was continued to the next meeting.<sup>2</sup> This affair offered a good excuse<sup>3</sup> for the Olivet and Providence churches to withdraw altogether from the Fox River Association and to devote their whole effort to upbuilding the colored Association of the state. Hence the Aurora Church was the only colored organization belonging to the Association.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there was still the best of feeling between the white and colored Baptists of Chicago.

The religious side of the church was always one of the features that Pastor De Baptiste stressed. His method, which he continued and which was generally characteristic of Negro

1 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1869, p.3.

2 Ibid, pp.6, 22.

3 The Wood River Baptist Association did not approve of colored churches belonging to white associations. The Galesburg and Quincy churches were erased from the minutes of that body in 1868 for violating this rule. Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1868, p.11.

4 Minutes Fox River Baptist Association, 1869, p.18.



ministers, was to have revivals each year - at the beginning<sup>1</sup> or end of the year.<sup>2</sup> This did not preclude the spiritual awakening that brought others to Jesus all through the season.<sup>3</sup> Olivet was holding prayer meetings thrice weekly<sup>4</sup> and heard the gospel every Sunday, yet she nor the Providence Church were hardly meeting the needs of the nearly 4,000 Negroes<sup>5</sup> who were in the city. It was most natural that the church should see dark days as well as bright ones. But Pastor De Baptiste was not the least discouraged. He was undoubtedly the most outstanding man in the State.

In 1870 at the annual meeting of the American Baptist Free Mission Society, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 6-9, he was chosen president to succeed Elder A. L. Post who had served the Society so well for seventeen years. At this meeting it was clearly brought out in the resignation of the corresponding secretary, the Rev. Nathan Brown, "that the men best qualified to administer the affairs of our southern mission are our colored brethren." Furthermore, it was growing more and more evident that the Society had no mission to perform since slavery had been abolished. The nominating committee brought in the name

1 From January to April, 1871, 102 were welcomed to the church. The Standard, March 6, 1871; *ibid*, March 23, 1871; *ibid*, March 30, 1871; April 6, 1871. Cf. also the Standard, February 8, 1872; *ibid*, February 5, 1874; *ibid*, March 5, 1874; *ibid*, April 9, 1874; *ibid*, January 1, 1877; *ibid*, February 8, 1877; *ibid*, April 10, 1879; *ibid*, March 11, 1880; *ibid*, February 10, 1881; *ibid*, March 10, 1881; *ibid*, April 7, 1881.

2 *Ibid*, October 2, 1873; *ibid*, October 9, 1873; *ibid*, November 6, 1873; *ibid*, October 7, 1880.

3 *Ibid*, June 7, 1877; *ibid*, July 12, 1877; *ibid*, August 9, 1877; *ibid*, May 9, 1878; *ibid*, May 6, 1880; *ibid*, June 10, 1880; *ibid*, August 5, 1880.

4 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1869, p.10.

5 3,686 Negroes and 295,281 whites in Chicago according to the United States Census, 1870, p.110.



of Hiram Hutchins for president but the name of Richard De Baptiste was substituted in its place primarily because it was thought that he, as President of the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention could unite the two organizations. Mr. De Baptiste declined the nomination.

"It was noticeable that while many members expressed themselves on the question (of having a white or colored president) the white members of the society were in favor of placing a colored member at the head of the society, while a number of the colored members were opposed to the movement believing there was good reason to believe the step would impair the usefulness of their organization. Mr. Shelton, colored, expressed himself as being opposed to putting a black head on a white body, to which the Rev. John Duer, white, said that there was neither white nor colored bodies."

At length, the Rev. James Poindexter was elected president but resigned the next morning. In the afternoon, the tellers for an election of president reported that "the balloting resulted in favor of Rev. Richard De Baptiste, as president of the society. The newly elected president was welcomed to his seat by Eld. W. Shelton, and delivered an address on taking his seat."<sup>1</sup>

President De Baptiste left the meeting in Sampton, New Jersey, October 11, 1871, in consequence of the great Chicago fire. He left a note with Elder Troy declining the office for the ensuing year.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Minutes American Baptist Free Mission Society, 1869, pp.1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1870, p.1.



The Olivet meeting house escaped the conflagration of 1871,<sup>1</sup> but some of the members suffered slight losses.<sup>2</sup> One or two events took place between the fires of 1871 and 1874 that have some significance. On November 2, 1872, Mrs. De Baptiste, "wife of the estimable pastor of the Olivet Church," died.<sup>3</sup> On the afternoon of the second Sunday in October, 1873, the Aurora, Providence and Olivet Churches had a union Sunday School concert at Olivet which was addressed by Ex-governor Pinchback of Louisiana. The following Tuesday a missionary meeting was called for the purpose of forming a Circle auxiliary to the Woman's Society of the West (white).<sup>4</sup>

The next event of importance was the great Chicago fire. The people of Olivet were peculiar sufferers. On the day of the fire, the annual picnic of the church occurred, and there was an unusually large attendance of parents and children. When they returned they found all of their possessions utterly destroyed and their church, also.<sup>5</sup>

The church then sent an appeal to the denomination through the Standard for August 13, 1874. It read as follows:

The Olivet Baptist Church having lost their house of worship by the great fire of the 14th of July, and a large part of the church and congregation having lost their homes and nearly all their personal property by the same calamity, we find ourselves compelled to appeal to the sympathy and aid of our friends to help us to rebuild a house of worship.

1 The Standard, October 26, 1871.

2 Olivet received \$150 as a relief fund from donors to sufferers of the fire as a result of the appeal of the city pastors (including Mr. De Baptiste). Ibid, November 23, 1871; ibid, March 28, 1872; ibid, January 2, 1873.

3 Ibid, November 7, 1872.

4 Ibid, October 16, 1873; ibid, April 16, 1874.

5 Ibid, July 23, 1874.





The house destroyed was situated on Fourth avenue south of Polk street; it was built of brick, and was neatly and comfortably finished and furnished. It afforded religious accommodations to a large community of people, and sittings to from six hundred to eight hundred persons, and cost about one thousand dollars to finish it. The pews were rented but were free to all who desired a comfortable place to worship God, the expenses of the church being provided for by subscriptions and voluntary contributions of the members of the church and congregation. We are now disabled by the calamity that has fallen so heavily upon us, and cannot restore our house and thus provide for the religious wants of a large community Christ, and a generous public in this appeal.

After several meetings and consultations in regard to the location of the new meeting-house, the church had decided to rebuild on the spot where the old church stood, and to erect a house that will accommodate quite as many persons as the one destroyed did.

The insurance on the house that was burned (\$12,000 and a mortgage of \$2,000 on account of indebtedness incurred in its construction) is inadequate to do this, and it is yet uncertain just what amount we shall realize from the policies we hold. Sixteen thousand dollars will build us a neat, plain house that will seat eight hundred persons, and furnish Sunday-School rooms, and the other necessary conveniences for a city church, such as baptistry, dressing-rooms, pastor's study, etc. We shall have to expend several hundred dollars on a temporary place of meeting to keep our congregation together, until we can enter a new house commensurate to our necessities.

Contributions to this object will be solicited in the city by a committee furnished with printed copies of this appeal in books bearing the signatures in printed copy of the pastor and clerk of the church. And now friends will please be cautious to see that persons to whom they give are duly authorized.

Our friends abroad can send contributions to the pastor, Rev. R. De Baptiste, No. 12 Gano Street.

Done at a meeting for business held at 324 South Clark street, August 7, 1874.

R. De Baptiste, Pastor.  
Wm. C. Phillips,  
church clerk.

In the meantime, the congregation worshipped in Shield's Mission, Twentieth Street and Wentworth Avenue, in property



owned by the First Baptist Church. This property was donated to the Olivet people provided they assume the mortgage on it of \$3,000.<sup>1</sup> Here they worshipped until their new building was ready for occupancy.

After the fire, the city passed an ordinance opening Dearborn Street to Fourteenth Street. This ordinance meant that 27 feet of the 48 foot<sup>2</sup> lot of the Olivet Church had to be cut from its length and rendered it necessary for the congregation to purchase an adjoining lot (24 feet wide)<sup>3</sup> in order to have room to re-erect their church building. This lot cost \$4,500<sup>4</sup>. The property then had a frontage of 72 feet running from Fourth Avenue to Dearborn Street.<sup>5</sup>

The corner stone of the new edifice was laid on Thursday afternoon, August 6, 1875, with appropriate exercises. The pastor, Rev. Mr. De Baptiste, led the service. After singing a hymn, prayer was offered by Rev. W. J. Kermott of the Coventry Street Church. Rev. Mr. De Baptiste then made some remarks which were followed by short talks from Dr. Cheney, the Rev. G. C. Booth of Quinn Chapel A. M. E. Church, the Rev. W. W. Everts, Jr., the Rev. J. W. Malone of Bethel A. M. E. Church, the Rev. W. J. Kermott, the Rev. J. M. Whitehead, Hon. John Jones and others.<sup>6</sup>

The building, which was a combined business and religious

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1874, p. 9.

2 The Standard, July 15, 1875; Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. i, p. 324, says the lot was 50 feet wide.

3 The Standard, July 15, 1875.

4 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. i, p. 324.

5 The Standard, July 15, 1875.

6 Ibid, August 12, 1875.



structure, was already fairly under way. The plans of Architect B. J. Bartlett called for three stores on the first floor running from Fourth Avenue to Dearborn Street. On the second floor there were to be a lecture room, two parlors, pastor's study, kitchen, etc. The halls of entrance were to be 12 feet wide, with two flights of stairs from both streets, six feet in width. The auditorium was planned to occupy the third story, 48 x 51 feet, with galleries all around, with a baptistry under the rostrum, and two dressing rooms. The seating capacity was estimated between 750 and 800.<sup>1</sup>

By the winter, the building was under roof<sup>2</sup> and the congregation was worshipping in it by 1876. Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was a busy man. He had services morning and evening but not in the afternoon on account of the Sunday School meeting at 2:30. Prayer and conference meetings were held Wednesday and Friday evenings.<sup>3</sup> It was the Rev. Luther Stone who remarked, at the Ministers' Meeting on Monday, how well ordered the church was.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was himself always welcomed among his white brethren and was a frequent attendant upon the meeting of the Chicago Ministers' Conference of which he was an active member participating sometimes as principal speaker<sup>5</sup>

1 The Standard, July 15, 1875.

2 The structure was nearly under roof by September.

Ibid, September 23, 1875.

3 Ibid, July 12, 1877; ibid, July 19, 1877; ibid, May 30, 1878.

4 Ibid, September 11, 1879.

5 His subject Monday, December 15, 1879, was "The Education of the Colored People of the Southern States." Ibid, December 18, 1879.



and otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Mr. De Baptiste took an uncommon interest in foreign missions. When the Consolidated Convention began to consider the adoption of a mission in Liberia among the Passas, a foreign mission board of six members was created to handle that side of the Convention program. It is singular enough that this board was located at Chicago and that three of its members, - R. De Baptiste, corresponding secretary, W. C. Phillips and W. S. Johnson<sup>2</sup> - were from the Olivet Church. The Wood River Association also had a missionary Board with headquarters at Olivet. The Rev. Richard De Baptiste was chairman of this board and the Rev. John W. Polk, pastor of Providence Church, secretary.<sup>3</sup> Each church was to collect five cents a quarter from each member and send the same to the board.<sup>4</sup> And by the meeting of the Association in 1881 (at Olivet) many churches had made contributions.<sup>5</sup>

The Olivet Church had reached its high water mark in 1877 when there were 701 members, 79 of whom had been received that year by baptism.<sup>6</sup> From that time on the membership began to

1 The Standard, January 9, 1873; *ibid*, October 9, 1873; *ibid*, November 6, 1873; *ibid*, February 5, 1874; *ibid*, March 5, 1874; *ibid*, April 9, 1874; *ibid*, May 14, 1874; *ibid*, August 6, 1874; *ibid*, August 27, 1874; *ibid*, November 15, 1874; *ibid*, March 11, 1875; *ibid*, April 8, 1875; *ibid*, June 7, 1875; *ibid*, August 12, 1875; *ibid*, January 6, 1876; *ibid*, April 6, 1876; *ibid*, January 31, 1878; *ibid*, October 30, 1879; *ibid*, March 18, 1880; *ibid*, June 24, 1880.

2 American Baptist Year Book, 1879, p.18.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1880, p.7.

4 *Ibid*, p.13.

5 *Ibid*; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1880, p.59; The Standard, September 8, 1881.

6 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1877, p.10; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1877, p.58.





decrease so that by 1881 there were only 539 members.<sup>1</sup> The church reported to the Wood River Association that there was nothing encouraging about the whole situation; spiritually the was doing little, it was laboring under a heavy debt.<sup>2</sup> 130 of the members were dropped from the roll<sup>3</sup> for not bearing their financial responsibility. This is clear from the letter of Olivet to the Wood River Association, 1880, asking that that body give some expression in regard to members who do not assist in bearing the financial burdens of the church to which they belong. W. S. Johnson, a delegate to the Association from Olivet asked on the floor What should be done with a church that contracts to pay their pastor a stated sum and fails to do so?<sup>4</sup>

This matter was handed to the Committee on the State of the Churches, a part of whose report is here appended:<sup>5</sup>

We regret that some of our ministers fail to perceive the fact that they have outlived the day of their usefulness in the church and community in which they labor, thereby causing division and strife in the community. We, therefore, recommend that each minister keep a watchful eye and not allow himself to become the cause of strife and dissension in the church, thereby hindering the cause of Christ in the salvation of souls.

Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was a member of this committee and the above expresses his opinion in the matter. He was too wise to press salary matters when his church was already laboring under a debt of \$20,000.<sup>6</sup> He had done a good work; built two meeting houses for a people who were more influen-

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1880, p.14;  
Minutes Baptist General Association, 1880, p.56.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1879, p.13.

3 Ibid, 1880, p.14.

4 Ibid, p.3.

5 Ibid, p.9.

6 Ibid, 1883, p.14.



tial than any other group of colored Christians in the city of Chicago. In the midst of his great glory and at the height of his usefulness, he resigned, December, 1881,<sup>1</sup> deciding to devote his time more and more to the small and needy places in Illinois.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the resignation of the Rev. Richard De Baptiste, he was scarcely past middle life, being born at Fredericksburg, Virginia, November 11, 1831. All through his long pastorate he proved a friend to ministers,<sup>3</sup> especially young ones, ordaining several who lived useful lives<sup>4</sup> and helping others in their struggle to reach their goal.

1 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, pp.44f.

2 He served as pastor to the struggling Evanston, Galesburg, Shiloh, Chicago, and Elgin churches. Ibid, 1883, p.57; ibid, 1900, p.xxxi; ibid, 1901, pp.17f; American Baptist Year Book, 1887, p.21; ibid, 1888, p.26; ibid, 1889, p.24; ibid, 1890, p.31; ibid, 1892, p.32; the Standard, April 27, 1901; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, p.1; ibid, 1884, p.25.

3 The ordained ministers belonging to Olivet in 1881 were Wm. Balay, S. T. Clanton and J. W. Polk, John W. Hall and H. Evans, the three last being former pastors of the Providence Church. J. W. Terry was a licentiate. Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1881, p.19.

4 Thos. L. Johnson, ordained April 15, 1869, for Denver, Colorado. The Standard, April 15, 1869; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1869, p.16. He also served as a foreign missionary. The Standard, June 23, 1871.

William Balay, ordained, December 11, 1873, for Wyandotte Kansas. Ibid, December 25, 1873. Balay, Life and Work of Rev. William Balay, pp.6-15.

J. W. Terry was ordained, superintendent of missions for the Wood River Association, December 18, 1881. The Standard, December 29, 1881.

Solomon T. Clanton, distinguished for his participation in the formation work of the National Baptist Convention was ordained May 26, . The Standard, ?

De Baptiste was in the recognition council of the University Place Baptist Church, May 26, 1868. The Standard, May 27, 1868.

He extended the hand of fellowship to Isaac Fallis of the Michigan Avenue Church who was ordained December 3, 1876, for work among the civilized Indians. The Standard, Dec. 7, 1876.



Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was no ordinary man. His ancestry easily distinguished him from that great mass of moving humanity known as the public. One can readily understand why his forebears were so actively engaged in the underground railroad when it is known that they inherited their love of freedom from their French ancestors who came to America during the French Revolution, one of whom served as a body guard to the Marquis de La Fayette. The Rev. Richard De Baptiste had a zest for freedom and a burning zeal for education, pursuing studies in Michigan (Detroit), where he went when nine years old, Kentucky in in Illinois, at the Chicago Union Theological Seminary.<sup>1</sup> He also taught school in the outskirts (Mt. Pleasant) of Cincinnati, where he married a former student of Oberlin University.<sup>2</sup> For a number of years he edited newspapers intended to elevate his people. Rev. Mr. De Baptiste was a man of refined character, of charming manner, a good preacher and a successful pastor. He stood for good order and education. "He was a power among his people, not because of the purity of his life and the earnestness of his purpose."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Carter G. Woodson rightly says<sup>4</sup> that Richard De Baptiste "was not only the outstanding minister of his denomination in the West, but one of the most influential men of his race."

1 The Standard, April 27, 1901.

2 My thanks are due Mrs. Georgia De Baptiste Faulkner who corroborated many of these details and added facts which throw light on the history of the Olivet Church.

3 The Standard, April 27, 1901; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1901, pp.17f.

4 The History of the Negro Church, p.242.



For the Olivet Church, Richard De Baptiste did several things that stand for all time. He put the Baptists of Chicago foremost among the denominations of color in the city. He labored so that the pastorate of Olivet carried with it the leadership of the city and state, if not the middle west. He established and sealed a vital relationship between the white and colored Baptists of the city, evidence of which is the numerous references made of his work in the local white Baptist papers and the same distinctions given to other pastors of Olivet as a natural concomitant with the leadership of that church. He, further, raised Olivet to the third Baptist Church, in point of size, in the city, thereby giving it a permanent religious value.





## CHAPTER III

1882-1903

The next pastor of the Olivet Baptist Church had a rich heritage from the past and nearly 7,000 Negroes in the City<sup>1</sup> from which to draw in order to make the church what it ought to have been. Of course the people were so accustomed to intelligent preaching that they would countenance no unlearned pastor although some of them had been removed from slavery less than twenty years.

Attention was turned to the Reverend James A. D. Podd of London, Ontario, who became known to the Olivet people at the meeting of the Wood River Baptist Association there in 1881, and who spoke of the need of \$300 or \$400 to complete his church edifice at London<sup>2</sup> where he had labored for two years. Subsequent to the resignation of the Reverend Richard De Baptiste, Rev. Mr. Podd was invited to visit the church. This visit resulted in his being called to the pastorate of the Olivet Baptist Church, which he accepted commencing his service the first of February, 1882.<sup>3</sup>

Quite a ministerial gathering assembled at Olivet on Tuesday evening, February 9, to participate in the recognition service of the new minister. On the Platform sat the retired minister, the Reverend Richard De Baptiste, Doctor Lorimer, Doctor Kennard, and the Reverends S. T. Clanton, J. W. Terry, J. W. Polk, J. W. Lawes, J. A. D. Podd and Rev. Mr. Jacobs.

1 According to the United States Census, 1880, p. 208, there were 6,480 Negroes and 496,495 Whites in Chicago.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1881, p. 5.

3 "Minutes Illinois Baptist Pastoral Union" in the Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, pp. 44f.



The sermon was preached by Doctor Kennard from I Timothy 4:10; prayer of installation, Rev. Mr. De Baptiste; charge to the church, Doctor Lorimer; charge to the pastor, Rev. Mr. Polk. Rev. Mr. Jones of Bethel A. M. E. Church then followed with a cordial address of welcome. Rev. Mr. Jacobs, pastor St. Stephens A. M. E. Church, Rev. Mr. Clanton of the Baptist Union Theological Seminary and Rev. Mr. Terry also participated. At the close of the installation services, Deacon William C. Phillips "on behalf of the deacons and the church presented a very affectionate and touching address to the retiring-pastor."<sup>1</sup>

This was a case of practically the entire Baptist and Methodist brotherhood of Chicago honoring the pastor-elect of the Olivet Church. The reason is clear. Rev. Mr. Podd was an uncommon and rare intellect.

James Alfred Dunn Podd was a native of Nevis, British West Indies. He was a brilliant, young, educated, unmarried man, just twenty-seven years old (being born March 16, 1855) at the time of his call to the Olivet Church. His father, a minister of the Wesleyan Church, moved to St. Christopher Island where he put his son in an academy. James Podd finished there and with a view of preparing himself for the Episcopal ministry went to England and finished a classical collegiate course. He left England, however, before completing his theological course and returned to the West Indies where he was appointed to important positions in connection with the school system, at one time he was superintendent of schools. He was also editor of a journal devoted to education, literature and

1 The Standard, February 9 and 16, 1862.



religion, previous to his emigration to Canada. In Canada he joined the British Methodist Episcopal Church and entered its ministry. He served in the pastorates of several of its congregations, but having undergone a change in his views on the subject of baptism, he united with the Baptist church at St. Cathrine's, Ontario, where he was ordained into the ministry of the Baptist church. He served the St. Cathrine's and London churches successively as pastor.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence of the scholarly attainment and thorough education of Rev. Mr. Podd can be gleaned from the excellent wording of the report of the Committee on Education, of which he was chairman, at the meeting of the Wood River Association in 1882:<sup>2</sup>

Still have we to lament (it said) the indiscretion of our churches in hastily ordaining men to the ministry who are educationally unequal to the demands of our cultured congregations for logical coherency on their arguments, in defense of the doctrines of Christianity, and for clearness and force in their expositions of divine truth.

Moreover, Rev. Mr. Podd was an eloquent pulpiteer. He was strongly attached to the forms of service in the Episcopal Church which would often assert itself in his manner of conducting his pulpit ministrations.<sup>3</sup> Brilliant? Yes! Scholarly? Surprisingly so! Eloquent? Of course! But with all of this, the Reverend James A. D. Podd was heir to all of the dangers that brilliancy usually possesses. His career shows that he was of unstable character. The church under him did not prosper and all that it could say to the Associa-

1 "Minutes Illinois Baptist Pastoral Union" in Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, pp.44f.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1882, pp.3f.

3 "Minutes Illinois Baptist Pastoral Union" in Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, pp.44f.



tion was that "nothing very encouraging have we to write."<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Mr. Podd was not a mixer as the other pastors had been. He seemed to be little interested in the development of the Baptists of Chicago and vicinity. Whether the huge debt of the church made it necessary for the pastor of Olivet to stay close to his job, or whether disinterested or hindered by reasons unknown to the writer, it is certain that he was not present in the recognition council called, the latter part of November, 1882, to vote their approval of the twenty members who called themselves the Second Baptist Church, Evanston. The First Church, Evanston, Second Church, Elgin, Providence Church, Chicago, and the Olivet Church through her representative, Rev. Mr. Clanton, composed the council.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, it became a matter of general comment that Pastor Podd had fainting spells which often made it necessary for him to stop his sermon. At first blush, the congregation sympathized but after investigation many were indignant to know that their brilliant young minister was a man of inten-

1 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1882, p.16.

2 The Standard, November 30, 1882. Some of her ministers have been:

1887	Rev. Richard De Baptiste	
	Rev. Charles L. Fisher	
1890-1891	Rev. Stephen Taylor	25 members
1892	Rev. G. M. Davis	
1893	Rev. Stephen Taylor	
1895-1898	Rev. E. H. Fletcher	
1899	Rev. Stephen Taylor	
1900	Rev. Mr. Gray	
1900-1910	Rev. B. P. E. Tayler	
1911-1922	Rev. I. A. Thomas, A. M., D.D.	600 " (?)

The American Baptist Year Book, 1887, p.21; the Standard, May 15, 1890; *ibid*, June 30, 1892; *ibid*, January 11, 1894; *ibid*, Supplement, July 12, 1894; *ibid*, November 15, 1894; *ibid*, October 17, 1896; *ibid*, May 12, 1900; Minutes Bethlehem Association, 1909-1922. Minutes Baptist General Association, 1890-1906; Minutes Illinois Baptist State Convention, 1906-1921.





perate habits.

It was then that trouble began which seemed finally not only to impair the usefulness of the Olivet Church but of the denomination at large. The whole matter was aired to the public. As a result, "on Thursday, February 8th, a council of Baptist churches met to consider the causes and if possible to secure peace. The council was called to order by Rev. Lewis Raymond and the Rev. C. Perren was chosen moderator. After a prolonged sitting a series of resolutions was formulated by Dr. Burroughs, which it was decided to submit to the church for their acceptance on the following evening. A delegation consisting of Dr. Burroughs, Dr. Goodspeed, Revs. Burhoe and Macgregor were appointed to represent the council. On Friday evening there was a very large gathering of the church. Dr. Burroughs presided and asked the Rev. D. Macgregor to preach a sermon suitable to the condition of the church. The subject chosen was Ps ixvi.10, 'The purifying effect of church troubles.' After the sermon the church was called to order and Dr. Burroughs submitted the resolutions of the council which were accepted heartily and unanimously by a rising vote, the church expressing its gratitude to the council for its wise and effective help in the hour of need."<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of a clear understanding of the situation, it would be interesting to know what the council recommended. The Minutes of the Illinois Baptist Pastoral Union<sup>2</sup> state that some members withdrew from the Olivet Church and organized

1 The Standard, February 22, 1933.

2 In Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, pp.44f.



another in the south part of the city and called Rev. Mr. Podd, who accepted the pastorate in February, 1883. This statement is evidently incorrect, but granting its truth, Did the council advise a union of the membership of the Olivet Church? Or Did they advise Rev. Mr. Podd to resign? Most likely the latter!

At any rate, he did resign and by the next meeting of the Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, had organized the Bethesda Baptist Church, which met first on Indiana Avenue, between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Streets.<sup>1</sup> Their letter to the Association reads:<sup>2</sup>

On the 4th of March, 40 persons,<sup>3</sup> believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and members of Olivet Baptist Church, having received letters of dismission for that purpose, organized themselves into a church of Christ at a council of which, Rev. J. A. D. Podd was Moderator and Henry Nelson, Clerk. We hold a lease for four years on a building on Dearborn Street, south of 29th Street, and have prepaid our first year's lease in full.

Some of Olivet's strong members, including Deacon R. Moon and Timothy Cooper united with the Bethesda Church. This event meant more than a separation as to quantity; it was qualitative. The Bethesda Church has always been composed of intellectual elite.

There is no doubt, however, that the best of feeling existed between the Olivet and Bethesda Churches. On Monday, March 12th, a recognition council of several of the sister

1 The Standard, March 22, 1883.

2 Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. i, p. 324, says that the initial number of members of the Bethesda Church was 46. There is no doubt that the new church soon had that number. The Standard, March 22, 1883. Cf. also Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. iii, p. 815.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, p. 17.



churches was called and the pastor-elect of Olivet, the Rev. H. H. White, extended the hand of fellowship.<sup>1</sup>

The new pastor of the Olivet Baptist Church had assumed his duties shortly after the resignation of Rev. Mr. Podd. He was a man of middle life, being born near Indianapolis, Indiana, February 12, 1837, and was no novice in the ministry. He had pastored successfully the leading churches of Denver, Boston, Cincinnati, Little Rock, where he also was president of the Missionary Baptist Convention of Arkansas,<sup>2</sup> St. Louis and elsewhere.

Henry Harrison White was practically a self-educated man, but had read widely. He ought to have been a logical and forceful speaker, which he was, having as his grandfather, the illustrious Patrick Henry, whose surname he bore.<sup>3</sup>

This kindhearted, outspoken, gospel preacher was introduced to the Ministers' Meeting, March 12th, 1883,<sup>4</sup> and from that time went immediately to work. This was necessary because an exodus of Negroes from Tennessee and Kentucky was becoming residents of Chicago. Fifty of these persons joined the Olivet Church by letter in less than a month<sup>5</sup> and others were coming.<sup>6</sup>

1 The Standard, March 22, 1883; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, p. 17; Andreas, History of Chicago, vol. iii, p. 815.

2 The American Baptist Year Book, 1872, p. 24; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1882, p. 22.

3 Mrs. Francis E. Cook, a member of Bethesda Baptist Church and daughter of Rev. Mr. White, has kindly furnished the writer with interesting facts concerning her father.

4 The Standard, March 15, 1883.

5 Ibid, April 5, and 12, 1883.

6 Ibid, May 10, 1883; ibid, June 7, 1883; ibid, November 6, 1884.



Providentially, too, the Western Indiana Railroad Company offered the church \$35,000 for its property. This was accepted and the site was used for what is now the Dearborn (Polk) Street Depot. The Olivet Church then paid off its heavy debt of \$20,000 and had a cash balance left. On Friday evening, May 11, 1883, a business meeting was held at which the trustees were instructed to purchase a lot on the corner of Victoria Place and Harmon Court, midway between State Street and Wabash Avenue, at a cost of \$13,500. \$10,000 cash was paid. It was the plan of the church to erect a new meeting house on the lot in the spring of 1884 but for the present they were to occupy the building on the lot.<sup>1</sup>

This event again restored the Olivet Church to its rightful place among the churches of Chicago. The Ministers' Conference honored the pastor of the Olivet Church by appointing him to read an essay, May 21, 1883, on the religion of the Negro.<sup>2</sup> He did so saying among other things that the Negro is given the same religious instincts as other people and that they responded more readily to worship than people of other races. Appreciative remarks were made by many of the ministers present<sup>3</sup> which were not feigned but continued a part of their sympathetic relations with the colored Baptists.<sup>4</sup>

By the summer of 1884, the new Olivet Church on Harmon Court was ready for occupancy. It was a plain, unpretending brick structure, without a tower or steeple and not ornamented but its audience room was plenty large to accommodate all of

1 The Standard, May 17, 1883; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, p.14; Andreas, History of Chicago, vol.1, p.324.

2 The Standard, May 17, 1883.

3 Ibid, May 24, 1883; cf. also, ibid, June 7, 1883.

4 Ibid, July 5, 1883; cf. also Appendix C.





the members of the congregation. A debt had been incurred in building this structure,<sup>1</sup> but the influx of Negroes had added so many new members to the church that the debt seemed negligible. Nevertheless, in order that the church might secure a loan to care for the indebtedness, the organization was re-incorporated. This was necessary since the former incorporation papers had been burned in the fire of October 9, 1871. Thus the church was re-incorporated as "The Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago," October 13, 1884, and seven trustees elected.<sup>2</sup>

Olivet was not only able to make a venture for a new church home in a time like that, but Bethesda also. The following summer, they too dedicated a beautiful new building at the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Butterfield (now Federal) Street. The Rev. H. H. White preached the dedicatory sermon in the morning.<sup>3</sup>

The Olivet Church was going on, growing by leaps and bounds. Although her letters to the Wood River Association in 1884 and 1885 show a discrepancy of 83 and 53 members respectively, it is explained by the fact that many of the migrants were overlooked in the calculation.<sup>4</sup> The membership had increased approximately 200 during the pastorate of the Reverend H. H. White. This meant that the church had to have more meetings than just preaching services twice Sundays, prayer meetings Wednesday and Friday and the Sunday School in the af-

1 The Standard, August 7, 1884.

2 Abstract No. 1147013, pp. 4f. The trustees were Wm. S. Johnson, John W. E. Thomas, George A. Johnson, Dennis Thomas, Benjamin M. Coffee, Elijah C. Coffee, Albert C. Brown, *ibid*, p. 5.

3 The Standard, July 9, 1885; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1885, p. 29.

4 Compare page 44, paragraph 3, with Appendix G; cf. the Standard, February 14, 1884; *ibid*, March 6, 1884.



ternoon.<sup>1</sup> It had other organizations for Christian service - a Missionary Society, a Young Ladies' Sewing Circle, a Wite Society and a Young Men's Christian Union<sup>2</sup> of which it was justly proud.

Nevertheless, with this splendid record as a part of the faithful ministry of Pastor White, there was a growing element, particularly of some of the old members, in the church, which was displeased with the pastor honored alike by white and colored.<sup>3</sup> Rev. Mr. White was no fighter; he always withdrew when any group was not in sympathy with his efforts. As a result, he resigned the Olivet Church, July 1, 1886.<sup>4</sup>

It was quite evident that there was always going to be trouble at the church while seven ordained ministers of the congregation were ornaments.<sup>5</sup> Probably some of this number supplied the church during the interval of nearly a year that transpired before the Olivet Church decided to call a minister.

In the meantime, affairs at Olivet and, as a matter of fact, in Chicago needed a strong man to guide the scores of Negroes who were coming North. Rev. Mr. Polk of the Providence Church had been given a years vacation since October, 1886, and the Reverend W. H. Harrison of Bloomington was supplying until he returned. There were only 106 members and these were in debt \$700<sup>6</sup> on their new house of worship which cost only \$2,500.<sup>7</sup> The church at Aurora had hardly recovered from the fire that destroyed its building in 1883.<sup>8</sup> The Evanston

1 The Standard, November 1, 1883.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1885, p.12.

3 He was president of the Ministerial Union of the Wood River Baptist Association in 1883 and 1884. Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1883, p.1; *ibid*, 1885, p.21.

4 *Ibid*, 1886, p.12.

5 There were 9 ordained ministers belonging to the Olivet Church in 1886, 7 of whom were unengaged. *Ibid*, pp.12, 21.

6 *Ibid*, p.16.

7 *Ibid*, 1884, p.19.

8 The Standard, July 5, 1883.



Church was barely alive, being able to have no settled minister. The Bethesda Church was little better off. She had only 125 members, but no pastor. Rev. Mr. Podd who went to Jacksonville, Florida, for his health, died there of consumption December 23, 1866.<sup>1</sup> His successor, the Reverend Bird Wilkins, a graduate of Nashville Institute and Hamilton Theological Seminary,<sup>2</sup> had some trouble about open communion,<sup>3</sup> for the settlement of which Rev. Mr. Wilkins severed his connection with the Baptist church.<sup>4</sup> These were days full of disappointment and crises for the Negro Baptists of Chicago and vicinity.

One event, though served to mould the Olivet Church into a unified whole for Christian service. It was sad yet it worked good. While William S. Johnson, a member of the church for thirty years, a Sunday School teacher for twenty-five years and in the third year year of his superintendency of the Sunday School,<sup>5</sup> was attending church meeting, March 10, 1867, he suddenly dropped dead.<sup>6</sup>

1 The Standard, December 30, 1866; "Minutes Illinois Pastoral Union" in Minutes Baptist General Association, 1867, pp. 44f; Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1867, p.6.

2 The Standard, April 21, 1867.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1867, p.20.

4 The Standard, September 22, 1867. As near as the materials 5t hand indicate, the pastors of the Bethesda Church have been:

1883-1886	Rev. J. A. D. Podd	40- 125 members
1887	Rev. B. Wilkins	131
1887-1889	Rev. J. Chavis	131-186
1890	Rev. W. A. Burch	
1891-1893	Rev. J. W. Muse	
1893-1895 (?)	Rev. W. A. Burch	275
1896-1898	Rev. J. E. Ford	316
1899-1900	Rev. G. Duncan	
1901	Rev. W. R. Boone	132
1905	Rev. R. H. C. Mitchell	205
1906	Rev. G. Duncan	182
1907-1922	Rev. E. T. Martin, D.D.	158-

5 The Standard, April 21, 1867.

6 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1867, p.26.



In December, 1886, the church extended a call to the Reverend J. F. Thomas of Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Mr. Thomas was a middle aged man who had spent twenty-one years in the active Ministry. He was born in Washington, D. C., April 25, 1843. During the Civil War, he served first as cook, and then as orderly or sergeant. It was while on duty as a soldier that a bullet, which he carried through life, lodged in his left shoulder.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Mr. Thomas was a fighter through and through. It matters little whether our fathers fought with him or not, whether we are of his faith or of another, there is no doubt that the history of the Olivet Church is the richer because Mr. Thomas lived.

John Francis Thomas had a wonderful personality and people instinctively gathered around him. He was a self-educated man boasting of only one days attendance at school in his whole life, but he was the kind of preacher the common folk liked. Rev. Mr. Thomas had not been at Olivet a year before he reported to the Wood River Association, 83 received by baptism, 59 by letter and 242 by Christian experience. The membership of the church was 1248.<sup>3</sup>

As the other pastors of the church had been interested primarily in home missions, here was a man whose attention was primarily turned toward the foreign field. In Kentucky, he had been the corresponding secretary of the first meeting of

1 Mrs. Charles Davis, a relative of Wm. S. Johnson, has kindly given this information.

2 Cf. Stewart, Memorial Life of John F. Thomas, D.D. - a pamphlet by no means commemorative of the life of such an outstanding man.

3 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1887, p.21; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1887, p.84.





the South-western and Southern Missionary Baptist Convention.<sup>1</sup> He served as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Wood River Baptist Association the first year he represented in that body.<sup>2</sup> He was also Moderator of that body for a number of years.

Moreover, the headquarters of the Baptist General Association of the Western States and Territories, organized 1873, which commissioned two missionaries for Africa in 1885,<sup>3</sup> were in Chicago. Rev. Mr. Thomas was elected the assistant moderator of that body in 1887. Then it was that the Association changed its name to the Baptist African Missionary Convention of the Western States and Territories<sup>4</sup> and gave its attention wholly to Africa. He occupied the position of assistant moderator in 1888<sup>5</sup> and was the president of the Convention from 1889 to 1892.<sup>6</sup> To show that he had greatly improved upon his one day's schooling is necessary only to cite the fact that he was a member of the Bureau of Education of the National Convention in 1887.<sup>7</sup>

Rev. Mr. Thomas was, moreover, building a great church around his personality. He never again quite equaled the mark of 1894 when there were 1575 members.<sup>8</sup> By that time, the Olivet Church was easily the second largest Baptist institution in the city.<sup>9</sup> Preaching services were as usual, at 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., Sunday School at 2:30 p.m. and prayer meetings Wed-

1 The American Baptist Year Book, 1876, p.4.

2 Minutes Wood River Baptist Association, 1887, p.4.

3 The American Baptist Year Book, 1886, p.22.

4 Ibid, 1888, p.23.

5 Ibid, 1889, p.24.

6 Ibid, 1890, p.29; Ibid, 1891, p.28; Ibid, 1892, p.31; Ibid, 1893, p.34.

7 Ibid, 1888, p.26.

8 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1894, p.158; cf. also Appendix G.

9 The Standard, June 13, 1895.



nesday and Friday and the Baptist Young People's Union on Monday evening.<sup>1</sup> The church was supporting a mission in Oak Park that had regular Sunday and week night services,<sup>2</sup> which were maintained until the late fall of 1896<sup>3</sup> when the mission probably united with the Mt. Carmel Church of Oak Park. By 1896 the Sunday School was held at 9:30 a.m.<sup>4</sup>

True to the history of the Olivet Church, her pastor had most unselfish devotion in building up the Baptists in Chicago. Pastor Thomas was clerk of the council that ordained Mr. Charles L. Fisher of the Morgan Park Seminary for the pastorate of the Second Baptist Church of Evanston, September 29, 1887.<sup>5</sup> He was also moderator of the council that ordained Mr. S. C. Goosley, pastor of the Bethesda Church, September 17, 1891.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Mr. Thomas was a man of large ideals, although in this seeming virtue lay his apparent weakness. It is unexplainable why he desired to have the church re-incorporated, but on August 1, 1892, he was moderator of the meeting that

Resolved: The trustees, Frank W. Rollins, Harry Burgess, Wm. W. Brown, Henry P. Smith, Douglas H. Mason, Wm. M. Spencer and John Henderson are hereby authorized to have the above said church incorporated as Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

This resolution shows the strong grip which the pastor had on

1 The Standard, May 15, 1890; *ibid*, January 11, 1894; *ibid*, July 12, 1894 (supplement); *ibid*, November 15, 1894; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1894, p. 99.

2 *Ibid*, January 11, 1894; *ibid*, July 12, 1894 (supplement); *ibid*, November 15, 1894.

3 *Ibid*, October 17, 1896.

4 *Ibid*.

5 *Ibid*, October 6 and 27, 1887.

6 *Ibid*, November 19, 1891.

7 Abstract No. 1147013, p. 6.



the people. They were following him. Certainly, no creditor that had done business with the Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago could hold a claim against Olivet Baptist Church of Chicago, Cook county, Illinois. At any price, he would be inconvenienced in getting a settlement.

The church property on Harmon Court was sold in 1895 and the congregation moved to Arlington Hall, 31st Street and Indiana Avenue.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, August 7, 1893, Olivet Church bought three lots at 27th and Dearborn Streets for \$13,000.<sup>2</sup> On March 13, 1895, the church entered into contract with Jasper M. Higginbotham, one of her members, to erect a stone and brick building on the site. He commenced work and continued the same until May 29, 1896.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Higginbotham says that by that time only the foundation was laid and a beginning made on the edifice.

The work then ceased for two years because, as the contractor says, the church was unable to raise funds sufficient to pay the sub-contractors. The money stringency of the country during this period also made it impossible to float a loan on the property.

As a result, some of the sub-contractors, Wensel Morava, John Vanderpoel, and John Vanderpoel, Jr., doing business as Vanderpoel and Company, filed a bill, January 4, 1896, for a mechanics lien on the premises.<sup>4</sup> In January (23) of the fol-

1 I am following here the recollections of Mr. Jasper M. Higginbotham, a member of Olivet, who favored me with an interview.

2 Abstract No. 1147014, p.3; cf. also abstract No. 591944.

3 Abstract No. 1147014, p.18.

4 Ibid, pp.5f, 19.



lowing year, the church executed and delivered to Mr. Higginbotham a trust deed to secure upon others a note payable for \$2,436.85 for a mechanics lien.<sup>1</sup> On November 19, 1898, the premises were sold at public vendue to W. Davenport for \$2750. He was entitled to a deed to the property, February 19, 1900, unless the premises should be redeemed according to law.<sup>2</sup> But Mr. Davenport in turn sold the property to E. Seneff.<sup>3</sup> On December 28, 1897, a bill was filed in the Circuit Court to foreclose the trust deed issued to Mr. Higginbotham.<sup>4</sup>

The whole proceeding was further complicated by cross bills filed, January 27, 1898, by Jasper M. Higginbotham for a mechanics lien amounting to \$29,698.85,<sup>5</sup> and, September, 1898, by Martha H. Norton and George W. Norton, executors of the property, who claimed that \$8000 with interest was due them some time before the property was sold to the Olivet Church.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally it took some time before the matter could be finally settled so that work had already been started on the basement of the proposed new meeting house. According to Mr. Higginbotham, the Olivet people were able to worship in the partially completed structure in the early part of 1898.

These years were full of stress and storm for the people of Olivet. Between 1897 and 1901 the membership of the church decreased from 1485 to 843 and it is to be supposed that less than half of these were active. Disruptive forces were at work and the mother church in Chicago could be expected to

1 Abstract No. 1147014, pp.8, 19.

2 Ibid, pp.8f.

3 Ibid, p.7.

4 Ibid, pp.9, 19.

5 Ibid, p.10.

6 Ibid, p.11f.





serve only as a feeder for the younger institutions that were so rapidly multiplying.

Besides the Olivet (1853), Providence (1865), Aurora (1867), Evanston (1882) and Bethesda (1883) churches, there were at least eight other Negro Baptist Churches in Chicago and vicinity - Shiloh, Englewood, (1888);<sup>1</sup> Hermon, North Side, (1889)<sup>2</sup>; Pilgrim, Englewood, (1893)<sup>3</sup>; South Chicago (1893?)<sup>4</sup>; Mt. Carmel, Oak Park, (1893)<sup>5</sup>; Mt. Zion, Evanston, (1893); Pilgrim Rest (1894?)<sup>6</sup>; and Friendship, West Side, (1897)<sup>7</sup> - and probably some others. There were so many of these churches that the Wood River Association had to appoint a missionary for the northern half of the Association<sup>8</sup> and in 1900 a North Wood River Association was formed.<sup>9</sup> The churches were multiplying because of the increasing Negro population<sup>10</sup> and the assertion of independence on the part of the people occasioned by the lack of a strong dynamic leadership.

On November 29, 1900, nine of the members of Olivet received their letters to form with others, the Berean Baptist

1 The Standard, March 7, 1889; *ibid*, October 17, 1896; *ibid*, May 12, 1900.

2 This church is often referred to as beginning in 1887 (cf. The Standard, October 17, 1896; *ibid*, May 12, 1900) but the Standard, February 21, 1889, says "Herman Baptist Ch - (col.) gathered under the labors of Pastor Chevis of Bethesda Church, was organized at Turner Hall, on the North Side, Feb. 10, with 20 members, others being ready for baptism."

3 The Standard, October 17, 1896.

4 *Ibid*, January 11, 1894; *ibid*, July 12, 1894 (supplement); *ibid*, November 15, 1894.

5 *Ibid*, October 17, 1896.

6 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1895, p. xxi.

7 The Standard, May 12, 1900; Minutes Baptist General Association, 1897, p. xxii.

8 The Standard, October 17, 1896; *ibid*, May 12, 1900.

9 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1900, p. xxxi.

10 The Negro population in Chicago in 1900 was 30, 150. United States Census, 1900, p. 613.



Church. The Reverend Forest A. Mc Coo was ordained minister.<sup>1</sup>

At length the master in chancery reported, February 26, 1901, on the case that had been pending, saying that the complainants, Martha H. Norton and George W. Norton, were to receive \$3,656.63 as principal and interest, \$157.88 as certificate of redemption with interest and \$100 solicitors fee.

Jasper M. Higginbotham was to receive \$6,580.56 but his claim for a lien was disallowed.<sup>2</sup> All the notes made by the trustees of the church were payable as made.<sup>3</sup> Vanderpoel and Company, Jasper M. Higginbotham and E. Seneff objected to this report but their objection was overruled by the master in chancery.<sup>4</sup> The decree of sale affirmed November 21, 1898, in the Circuit Court was set aside and Seneff enjoined from further prosecuting the ejectment suit for possession of the premises as the case stood in the Superior Court.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the property was sold to pay debts, July 9,

1 The Standard, March 16, 1901. The first sermon of that church was delivered by the Reverend Richard De Baptiste, D.D. This was one of the last acts of Rev. Mr. De Baptiste. He was at that time pastor of the Second Baptist Church, Elgin. He died of pneumonia at Chicago, Sunday, April 21, 1901. Minutes Baptist General Association, 1901, pp.17f. The Statistics of the Berean Church are as follows:

1901-1922 Rev. W. S. Bradden - 35-900 (?) members.  
Minutes Baptist General Association, 1901-1921.

2 Abstract No. 1147014, pp.21f.

3 Some of the creditors were:

Chicago Cut Stone Company	\$1400.	with interest 5%.
Englewood Sash and Door Co.	1850.	
F. W. Lam Company	1425.	
Charles F. Taffe (Moore,	241.	
Charles Bonner and James H.	889.83	
Lay, Purington and Bonner		
Brick Company	1634.70	
Wm. G. & John Oliver	389.69	

Ibid, pp.23f.

4 Ibid, pp.21f.

5 Ibid, pp.23f.



1901. Martha H. Norton and George W. Norton bought it for \$4,269.05. Perchance it was not redeemed in fifteen months, they were entitled to a deed to it, October 10, 1902.<sup>1</sup> However, it was redeemed July 16, 1902, by the Englewood Sash and Door Company and Charles Bonner for \$4,530.10 with interest at six per cent from date.<sup>2</sup> On August 28, they received a deed at the property.<sup>3</sup>

To further complicate the matter, the Vanderpoel and Company had also redeemed the property, July 22, 1902, and had procured a deed to the site on the 17th of August. They at once proceeded to board and nail up the meeting house and to affix signs stating the ownership and possession was in their hands.<sup>4</sup> To settle this affair, it was ordered that the Englewood Sash and Door Company and the Vanderpoel Company were each to have an undivided half interest.<sup>5</sup>

When the property passed out of the hands of the church, the pastor, Doctor Thomas, led his members back to Arlington Hall. Some thought that he was inclined not to leave that place. At any rate, the creditors of the congregation affirmed that they would have no more dealings with him, thereby showing that his followers would not again be able to enter the Twenty-seventh Street building. A few members, however, were not willing to fling to the winds that heritage for which so many had sacrificed for fifty years. It was nothing less than adamant courage that led a group to try to obtain admittance

1 Abstract No. 1147014, p.26.

2 Ibid, pp.34ff, 37.

3 Ibid, p.45.

4 Ibid, pp.46f.

5 Ibid, p.49.



into the Twenty-seventh Street meeting place. Everything had been lost in these years of turmoil.





CHAPTER IV<sup>1</sup>

1903-1915

Who would be willing to take a church recently divided, not owning a song book, Bible or chair, with no place to meet and \$28,000 in debt?

A man with such courage needed to possess in an eminent degree, the force of strong convictions, an unyielding purpose, clear perception, economical habits, imperturbable self-possession, a working knowledge of Negro-ology, a constitution of iron, a humble spirit and a firm reliance on the sustaining grace of God. Eyes were turned to the Reverend Elijah John Fisher, D.D., pastor of the Spruce Street Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, as the choice of the 600 people who courageously called themselves the Olivet Baptist Church.

The people of Chicago had been introduced to Rev. Mr. Fisher in the summer of 1902 when he spent his vacation at the University of Chicago as a student of Greek and Hebrew. Mr. Fisher then impressed the people as no ordinary man. First, because he had only one leg, the left one having been amputated above the knee when he was thrown under a moving train, April 3, 1880. Secondly, because he had done noble work in his forty years in the Christian life and twenty-one years in the ministry. Doctor Fisher was just a middle aged man at that, being born at La Grange, Georgia, August 2, 1858.

During his ministry, he had built several large and historic churches in Georgia and Alabama. Mr. Fisher was the

1 This chapter is an epitome of the writer's, The Master 's Slave, Elijah John Fisher (Philadelphia), 1922, with certain additions as are indicated in the footnotes.



pastor of the Mount Olive Baptist Church of Atlanta in 1895 when a Foreign Mission Board, a Home Mission Board and an Educational Board supplanted respectively the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States of America, the National Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Educational Convention, and became the offspring of a united body thereafter known as the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America. It was Pastor Fisher who led the progressive fight for Negro support of Home Mission schools in Georgia when the radicals withdrew and formed Central City College at Macon. As a pastor, it seemed his lot to be able to revive dying churches as is shown by his leadership at Mt. Olive Church, Atlanta, and to resuscitate historic congregations as is shown by his rebuilding in two years the great Spruce Str. Church, the oldest congregation in Nashville, which was destroyed by fire in 1900. The Conservator said:

After several telegrams passed between the official board and Dr. Fisher, he consented to pay us (Olivet) a visit which he did. The church was so well pleased with him that they extended him a call October 20th, 1902.

The Olivet Baptist Church logically carried with it the leadership of the Negro Baptist family in Chicago and Illinois. The former pastor on account of past connections desired with other ministers to hold that leadership, although the right to it was not his. Whereupon, opposition was manifested. With some of this opposition Mr. Fisher was acquainted but with other phases of it he was not. A letter from the official board speaks for itself the sentiment of the church regarding the former pastor and the property and also gives a light on the case of the 200 members who had been enjoined from coming back to Olivet.



To

Mr. Chauncey M. Miller:

You are hereby authorized to take charge of the interests of the Olivet Baptist Church in the matter now and heretofore pending between the church and its creditors represented by Israel Cowen, Mr. Dunne, and J. H. Hooper, and also the claim of Jasper Higginbotham; and obtain the best possible terms for settlement of the church debts and re-purchase of the church property; and for your services in endeavoring to effect such settlements and re-purchase, we agree to pay you the sum of three hundred dollars, in addition to your services in the injunction suit.

Chicago, January 20th, 1903.

The first expression of this growing antagonism towards Rev. Mr. Fisher was mild, but upon his installation Beelzebub and his demons seemed let loose. The services were held Monday evening, January 26, 1903. The program was made up of city celebrities including Dr. George C. Hall, the Rev. A. J. Carey, Hon. B. F. Moseley, Mr. Monroe N. Work, Dr. Johnson Myers, pastor the Immanuel Baptist Church (white), Mrs. G. M. De Baptiste Faulkner, Mrs. I. A. Davis, National Organizer Colored Women's Clubs, and Messrs. O. L. Ballinger, H. T. Elbey, S. A. Griffin and William Jefferson representing the church proper. In addition, the colored Baptist ministers were invited and were expected to take an active part but none of them appeared. Pastor Fisher anticipated this occurrence and asked his schoolmate, a man of national reputation, the Rev. P. James Bryant of Atlanta, Georgia, to officiate. Dr. Johnston Myers and Rev. Mr. Bryant made the principal addresses on this occasion, which have not been forgotten by those in sympathy with the aspirations of the Olivet people.

A spirit prevailed in Mr. Fisher not ordinarily seen. He says "under my pastorate I have succeeded in leading the members of Olivet to the belief that it was right to have the injunction dissolved and to declare ourselves at peace with



the world in general and Ebenezer in particular without discussing the whys and wherefores of the matter."

To confirm this report, the Olivet Church through its clerk, Brother Richard Williams, in reply to an "Unknown Baptist Preacher on the History of the Ebenezer Baptist Church" as it appeared in the "Conservator", March 7, 1903, said that, in addition to the fact that Rev. Mr. Fisher was not a party to the fight in the church last year, "our pastor had advised us to let Ebenezer<sup>1</sup> and Rev. Thomas alone."

The reason for this is clear. Mr. Fisher did not have the time nor the energy to waste in fighting. All of his powers at this critical time were required for the constructive work which was so needful. The pastor loaned his last dollar to the church so that they were able to rent the partially completed edifice for \$65 a month. The work was going on but not without a contest of words.

Glaring headlines characterized the issue of the Broadax for May 30, 1903, reading THEODORE W. JONES SAYS REV. E. J. FISHER MISMANAGES THE AFFAIRS OF OLIVET:

Perhaps no other community and not another church large or small would copy the generous method of the Olivet Church of this city in dealing with a jack-leg preacher. In many other places he would be made to pay the penalty for ignorance error and wrong doing by being driven out of town. But in Chicago, and at Olivet, he may go practically unwhipped of justice.

The Rev. E. J. Fisher through whose gross mismanagement the Olivet Church has just lost \$21,000 and who conscious of having such a bad case on his hands has actually opened a re-

I This was the church formed by Rev. Mr. Thomas. It was located at Thirty-fifth and Dearborn Streets. The membership increased to 1,350 by 1921 when Doctor Thomas died. The Rev. C. H. Clark, D.D., is the present pastor of the well housed congregation worshipping at Forty-fifth Street and Vincennes Avenue.





vival meeting, not out of love for the Master, not for the salvation of a single soul, but merely to detract attention from himself. If this show with all its acts is not sacrilegious, I do not know what it can be. But it signally illustrates a jack-legged preacher's alertness and resourcefulness in a case of emergency.

To call a man like Fisher honest is like calling black white, or eulogizing the devil as a noble character. By honesty, I do not mean simply scrupulous exactness in accounting for moneys collected. In this article I wish, especially, to apply the word to Fisher's attitude in opening a revival at this time.

The whole article from beginning to end shows an unfamiliarity with the facts in the case. That the church was to receive \$15,000 as a gift from an unknown donor if they could raise \$6000 was known to the treasurer, Deacon Henry Elroy, long before Rev. Mr. Fisher came to Chicago.

Chicago, Ill.,  
June 21, 1901.

Mr. H. T. Elroy,  
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Had an interview with the party that we were speaking of and he said that he had heard of that congregation before, and that they were not deserving but that he felt kindly towards them.

We will wait for him, Henry, to consider the matter, and I will make this proposition to you, but my name must not be mentioned to anyone for reasons that I have stated to you before.

If the congregation, Henry, that you are with will commence and raise from the first of July, 1901, to January first 1902, the sum of six thousand dollars (\$6,000) honestly

I will donate to you for the Olivet congregation, the sum of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) to be used in finishing their edifice or cancelling their indebtedness.

If this proposition is agreeable to your Pastor, executive officers and congregation, notify me at once so that I can then place the amount above mentioned at the disposal of the Executive officers of Olivet Baptist Church, if they can meet the requirement as to the raising of the amount above mentioned.

Yours very truly,

E. L.  
C. L. xxxx



There is something mysterious about the signature, familiarity and contents in this letter. Only Mr. Elby could decipher it. The donor had not been known prior to the installation services of Rev. Mr. Fisher. On that night he arose and said,

"Out of regard to Mr. Elby and my respect to this present pastor, I come. I believe your pastor is a worthy gentleman, and we are going to do everything to help the church under him to prosper."

For three months Mr. Elby negotiated with this party so that the \$6,000 raised was gone and Elby himself arrested. The Chicago Daily News reported a half column item under the heading: ELBY, CONVICTED TREASURER OF OLIVET (COLORED) BAPTIST CHURCH CONFESSES.

Henry T. Elby (it said) convicted of embezzeling \$6,000 of the funds of Olivet Baptist Church, colored, told to-day how he had been duped by two white men who worked on his credulity and made his eyes glisten by the use of the name of John D. Rockefeller. They persuaded him, he said, to tell the church Mr. Rockefeller would give the congregation \$15,000 towards a debt of \$28,000 if the members would raise \$6,000. They called the Standard Oil Magnate "John". They shone at church "sociables" and posed as capitalists. One of them, said Elby, got him to pay an installment on a suit of clothes so as to impress the colored church folk.

Now Elby faces the penitentiary. He says he does not want a new trial. But Judge Chytrous has ordered Assistant State's Attorney John R. Newcomer to lay before the present grand jury the names of the two white men. The Judge said the men should be indicted.

Elby made a complete confession to-day to a reporter for the Daily News, in the presence of Deputy Sheriff Wesley Plummer, and laid bare the story of intrigue and manipulations of the funds the church raised. One of the white men involved is said by Elby to be an oil stock promoter named Kinney. Elby introduced Kinney to the congregation and trustees as "Mr. Pelcalf, a friend of John D. Rockefeller". The other man is known to Elby and the church members as "J. Derriger."

"I first met this man, Derriger, in a lawyer's office," said Elby. "I was trying then to stave off a lawsuit against the church of which I was treasurer. Derriger was there and learned from me our trouble with the church debt. He said he



was in sympathy with the colored people, informed me he was a wealthy man and would help us by donating a large amount to the church. Derringer put up the scheme of writing the letter which purported to come from Rockefeller. Then we went to fix up a certified check to show that Rockefeller was in earnest about the donation and that it was safe if the church raised the required \$6,000. I went to Kinney and he made out the check at my request, and right here is where I got into trouble."

From the foregoing testimony it is easy to understand the contents of the following letter:

Chicago, Ill.,  
April 18th, 1903.

Mr. Henry T. Elby,  
66 State St.,

Dear Sir:

After having a pleasant interview with the Doctor (Fisher) and yourself, I suggested what was said to Father (Mr. Rockefeller). Knowing that he (Mr. Fisher) is firm in all matters of that kind and could not just as I did. Finally he consented to have our attorney to meet the attorney for the church, if so desired, and have him to explain his plans so that the same could be handed to Father. This will be attended to in a few days. We wish earnestly to impress that we have no desire to keep what is coming to the congregation in trust, if you wish the same, but we would like for you people to take good business advice. Please wait patiently for a reply from Father and Myself.

Sincerely yours,  
O. W. Belcalif.

It is hardly possible to imagine the amount of good that this controversy did in cementing the people to Rev. Mr. Fisher. Yet this was not the only uncommon happening of the opening days of the new minister's service to the Olivet Church.

Again an open letter to the Broadax, June 27, 1903, flashed the newsstands with this headline: WILLIAM JEFFERSON TRIUMPHS OVER REV. E. J. FISHER OF OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH. Recalling that Mr. Jefferson delivered the welcome greetings at the installation of Mr. Fisher you can appreciate the testimony in the case:

Rev. Fisher, Brothers Wimby, Edwards, Elby, Williams and Griffin were in the pastor's study about 11 O'clock at night,



when they heard a loud and "improper noise tending to the breach of the peace." Upon investigation it was learned that this loud and improper noise was heard toward the church... in the person of Brother Jefferson.

Dr. Fisher was so frightened that he was not in a fit condition to make an accurate description. He surveyed the enemy, yet he probably drew a mental picture of a monster half dragon with "feet like a bear, and a mouth as the mouth of a lion." Fortunately instead of making an unlawful and willful attack on the door of the church, the beast merely opened his mouth, not in blasphemy against God, as did the Revelator's beast, but in a threat to make Dr. Fisher jump in Lake Michigan. After this tendency to a "breach of peace" that loud and improper noise moved slowly down Twenty-seventh Street, much to the satisfaction and evident relief of Dr. Fisher and his panic stricken officers. About an hour later these "tin soldiers" formed themselves into a hollow square and escorted the Rev. Dr. Fisher to Mrs. Knuckles' home, two of the brethren remaining the rest of the night as a body guard...

This occurrence is interesting in detail and surely the writer had a vivid imagination but he only pictures one of the many incidents of Rev. Mr. Fisher's antagonism. He forgot to mention the individual who not only shot words but bullets at the innocent preacher. To this day the bullet hole in the study of the old church home is a memorial to the trials of Pastor Fisher. For many months he was heavily guarded on his way home. Added to this, the sheriff was at his door serving warrants almost as often as the weeks passed.

In spite of this opposition, marked attainment had been achieved for God in this year of kaleidoscopic turmoil. Of souls there had been won more than a hundred. The financial offerings of the church were triple that of any previous year. The people were well pleased with their minister, but Dr. Fisher had commenced to wonder if he should remain in Chicago. Churches in the Southland were asking for his guidance. He might have played the role of a quitter, but he had an aversion to what Doctor Benedict calls "Mr. Stayshort" preacher.

There were encouraging moments even in the darkest hours of reflection. He was granted certain courtesies by rail-





roads to any points he desired to go and his endorsement was necessary in order that Negro Baptist preachers get clergy permits. The following letter shows with what esteem the pastor of Olivet was held by the white Baptists:

Chicago, Ill., Oct. 29, 1903.

To Whom It May Concern:-

This letter certifies that I am personally acquainted with Dr. E. J. Fisher, the present pastor of the Olivet Baptist Church of this city. He is a graduate of our Home Mission School in Atlanta, Georgia, and for some years was one of our trustees of our Spelman Seminary in Atlanta. Dr. Morehouse, during his recent visit in this city, spoke in high terms of the business ability of Mr. Fisher and expressed himself as feeling confident that the Olivet Baptist Church here would clear its property of indebtedness and be established in the community should Dr. Fisher's life be spared for this work.

I have known the struggles of the Olivet Baptist Church here for the past eight years and feel for the first time during these years, confident that it will become financially and permanently established if Dr. Fisher is spared and if his appeal to the Brethren is responded to. I trust that all who can will help in this matter according to their ability.

Judson B. Thomas, Dist. Sec'y.

Olivet Church had a facsimile of this letter printed and with a statement from the clerk, Brother Thomas W. Stevens, concerning the exact state of affairs, addressed these communications to the people. The statement read:

You have doubtless seen through the daily papers of the loss of six thousand dollars (\$6,000) to the Olivet Baptist Church by embezzlement of our treasurer. The loss was very great. It caused the foreclosure of the mortgage and the sale of our beautiful house of worship on Twenty-seventh and Dearborn Streets. We are twenty-one thousand dollars (\$21,000) in debt. We are struggling to the extent of our ability to raise the money to buy the church back.

The Supreme Court has confirmed the decision of the lower court in giving the property back to us for the sum of ten thousand eight hundred fifteen dollars (\$10,815) provided we settle all of the outstanding claims first. This we are endeavoring to do and therefore ask that you donate some amount to help pay this debt, as we only have sixty days from date, to meet the requirement....

The effect of this plea and the recommendations of the



white brethren can be seen later in the marvelous way in which the occasion was met. All through this endeavor it is not hard to hear the workings of Rev. Mr. Fisher's brain. He had schooled his workers, laid his plans and successfully executed them.

Thus it is that no one acquainted with the history of the Olivet Church need be informed how well it was for the institution that Mr. Fisher decided to remain pastor. He saw his bitter antagonists paid with a vengeance divine. The paper that had been so uncharitable had almost become extinct. He lived to see the editor assigned to the asylum for the insane. His arch-enemies failed in business and had to seek to work their chicanery in other cities. Eloy was still imprisoned; Still, through it all, Mr. Fisher was not exultant; he sympathized. He immediately set to work to have him released, introducing and signing the petition. In reference to this and other Christian acts a periodical said of him: "His faults abound in his virtues; he is too charitable to his foes; he is too merciful to those who dislike him, and he is too broad to those who antagonize his efforts."

At the commencement exercise of Gaudalupe College, Se-quin, Texas, May 1904, Mr. Fisher received the degree of Doctor of Laws. He had twice before been honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity and now none but a very eminent divine could have well refused such a distinction, if he had so desired, without seeming to encourage the notice which he desired humbly to avoid.

By this time, the church was moving along smoothly. Besides the regular church services including preaching and prayer meetings and Bible classes, the church was the social



center of the community, the place of amusement and of gathering information. Even in early years, Mr. Fisher was in accord with the advancement of the times, encouraging athletic contests and a literary society where young and old could hear and discuss current events. Each New Year's day, the annual program under the auspices of the Standard Literary Society was rendered to commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation. Mr. Fisher believed that a church should distribute its activities equally over all forms of endeavor. How he applied this principle socially, let us see.

Twenty-seventh and Dearborn Streets was in the center of the most immoral section of Chicago. Painted and noisy prostitutes combed the streets for gold from the hands of dissipated adulterers. Saloons were on three corners. Chicago was "wide open." From these brothels useful members were converted.

Conditions were so deplorable that some good church members occasionally took "a little for the stomach's sake." Affairs were in such a shape until on communion Sundays the deacons thought nothing of going to a corner saloon and buying wine and substitution "Uneeda Biscuit" for the broken body of Christ. An end soon came to this and the officers were taught to make and use unfermented wine and unleavened bread.

The Honorable Edward F. Dunne, Mayor of Chicago wrote:

June 14, 1905.

Reverend and dear Sir:

Your letter of the 10th instant protesting against the conduct of certain saloon keepers at 27th and Dearborn Streets to hand. I have referred the same to the General Superintendent of Police with instructions that orders be given to the proprietors of these saloons that they must conduct them in a quiet and orderly manner or their licenses will be revoked.

Yours very truly,  
E. F. Dunne.



Evidently the licenses were revoked for in less than a year the three drink shops on Dearborn at Twenty-seventh Street were changed into thriving Negro businesses. The back door of the saloon on State Street that opened on Twenty-seventh Street was ordered closed and only the front entrance was allowed to be used.

The National Baptist Convention accepted an invitation to hold its twenty-fifth annual session in Chicago, September 13-19, 1905, as guests of the Olivet Church. Pastor Fisher knew that this event would do much toward turning the attention of Chicago to Olivet and enlightening the public upon the workings of the denomination.

In the meantime, the mortgage which had been held against the church since 1897 was burned but the church could spare no time to rejoice with such a full program ahead. The meeting of the Convention was just a few months distant. A contract was let for the completion of the house of worship at a cost approximating \$20,000. Workmen were busy night and day getting things in readiness for the Convention. An emergency appeal was sent to citizens of Chicago to help financially, and they did. Unfortunately, however, all the work done on the structure would not put it in readiness for the Convention.

After the event, however, the church was completed. The pews arrived in October and day and night were utilized in their erection. To the joy of every member and the surprise of the public, the dedicatory services were held the fifteenth of October, 1905. The auditorium, seating eighteen hundred,





was filled to capacity. Everything betokened success. There were two choirs: one in the front of the church and one in the rear conducted by the pastor's daughter. These choirs alternated in their singing giving rest and supplement to each other. The membership was divided between several circles or clubs of the church: Queen Esther, Andrewites (later Royal) Pastor's Aid, Helping Hand, Willing Workers and many others - so that each member could have close association with the other and an exact record could be kept. Also, a fraternity, the Brotherhood of Andrew and Peter, and its auxiliary, a sorority, the sisterhood, were well under way. These organizations in time of sickness paid each member four dollars a month and sixty dollars at death, with dues of fifty cents a month. These societies were not secret but were opened to any Christian who would meet bi-monthly to read and meditate over God's word. There were young men's clubs, girls' clubs and a mothers' union maintained along with the regular Sunday School and Baptist Young People's Union. The heads of the various auxiliaries constituted a general committee called the Heralds which met to plan with the pastor the work for each week.

Olivet was rounding into a machine running seven days a week, providing free employment for hundreds, a comfort station for the weary and divine worship for thousands. The membership responded excellently to the work. In August, 1905, a modern pipe organ was installed and Professor W. Alphonso Johnson, the blind prodigy, served as organist and director of the choir, which, under his training, became noted for its harmony.

The debt of the church was arranged for by the trustees



on the following articles of agreement:

Articles of agreement made this first day of February, A.D. 1907, between Baptist City Mission Society, a corporation organized and existing under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Illinois, of the City of Chicago, party of the first part, and Olivet Baptist Church, a religious corporation, of the State of Illinois, of the City of Chicago, party of the second part;

Witnesseth, that.... the said part of the second part hereby covenants and agrees to pay the sum of Eleven Thousand Nine Hundred and Sixty-eight Dollars (\$11,668), in the manner following: \$300 on executing this agreement, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged; \$1,000 on March 1, 1907; \$1,687 on September 1, 1907; \$1,621 on March 1, 1908; \$1,210 on September 1, 1908; and \$6,160 on March 1, 1909.

It is worth while here to note that the Olivet Church did not fail to pay back all of the money promptly; she thereby established a confidence in Negro Baptists that has remained unshaken to this day.

The congregation of Olivet felt assured of the further advancement of the church. Attention could then be turned to the surrounding needs of the unemployed who were suffering during 1908. The Chicago Tribune, February 8, contained a quarter column article telling how the church was helping the situation among both white and black.

Not only in this work but in pursuits in general did Pastor Fisher lead his church to help. Especially was this true in reference to the many smaller churches in the city and State.

Many of the churches were successful after Rev. Mr. Fisher recommended a man to them. The Rev. Samuel Sission, a life-long admirer and friend, accepted the pastorate of the St. Paul Church in Hyde Park. Central Church was a store front on State Street but under the Rev. G. M. Mason, a brother pastor of Mr. Fisher in Nashville, secured a commodious



building. The Rev. R. L. Darden of Georgia was recommended to the Providence Church on the West Side. Through a misunderstanding the congregation divided; Mr. Darden pastored one faction (The Tabernacle Church) and the Rev. S. L. M. Francis, Ph.D., D.D., was recommended to the other. The Rev. E. T. Martin was recommended to the Bethesda Church and successfully led the people from worship in a store to a beautiful church home on Wabash Avenue and Thirty-eighth Street. The Rev. S. A. Mathis was called to the Friendship Church on the West Side. The Bethlehem Church was organized at Glencoe, the Mt. Zion at Rockford, the Macedonia at Chicago<sup>1</sup> and another organization begun at Madison Wisconsin. The church at Evanston had been in confusion. The Rev. I.A. Thomas of Georgia was recommended as pastor and peacemaker. He remained a life-long friend of his sponsor and succeeded in erecting a modern edifice to house one of the most powerful congregations in Illinois. The Second Church, Joliet, was built after the design of the Olivet structure. Many other cities still enjoy the effects of Pastor Fisher's generous interest. On the whole, there were few colored churches in Chicago or vicinity that have not been helped morally or financially by Olivet under Pastor Fisher.

By 1909 the churches of Chicago and vicinity were so numerous that another association was formed. As a matter of fact, the North Wood River Baptist Association covered too much territory. It had 47 churches, 19 of which were in Chicago, and extended to Aurora, Elgin, Joliet, Lockport, Pontiac

1 Minutes Bethlehem Baptist Association, 1912, p.3.



Streator, Wheaton and Bloomington.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the Bethlehem Baptist Association was formed by Pastor Fisher and had its first session, with 14 churches representing, at the Friendship Church.<sup>2</sup> Although it purported to promote a "closer fellowship among the Baptist Churches of Chicago, and vicinity" it has never lived up to its object but on the other hand, it has done much good. Mr. Fisher would not be denied the leadership of the Baptists of Chicago.

He was more than a local figure fighting for recognition among the Baptists of Chicago. He was one of the outstanding men of the denomination.

Mr. Fisher was chairman of the delegation of the National Baptist Convention that sailed June 4, 1910, to be present at the World's Missionary Conference that convened in Edinburgh, Scotland. The results of this trip were plainly evident. The Rev. James H. Wilson and wife, members of the Olivet Church, were sent, December 27, to take charge of the Bethel Baptist Church, Demara, South America. Mr. Fisher became an enthusiast over missions. Doctor L. G. Jordan, Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, was invited to the church to speak especially on the work of his board. In the midst of Doctor Jordan's passionate plea for Africa, Pastor Fisher arose and stated that he would give his horse and buggy to the cause. His wife strenuously ob-

1 Minutes Baptist General Association, 1909, p.131; cf. also Minutes North Wood River Baptist Association, 1909, p.28.

2 The churches were: Berean, Friendship, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Moriah, Olivet, Second, Lagrange, Second, Harvey, Second Joliet, Second, Maywood, Second, Elgin, St. Paul, Shiloh, Mt. Zion and Central Union Baptist Churches. Minutes Bethlehem Baptist Association, 1909, pp.9f and al.





jected and Mr. Fisher had to content himself with making a donation. Probably the idea of a firey mare and buggy traveling from Chicago to Africa was ridiculous!

The Olivet Church then had 3100 members and it was easily the largest colored church north of the Mason and Dixon line. Such an organization was expected to do big things and it did. Through the efforts of Mr. Fisher, the church practically purchased the Mt. Forest Cemetary, in the suburbs of Chicago, which to-day is used and kept up almost wholly by the ever increasing number who die as members of the Olivet Church. It subscribed \$1600 dollars toward the erection of a colored Y.M.C.A. and continued to be a potent factor in the development of the Negro in the Northwest. Dr. Booker T. Washington paid the church a visit in 1910 and lectured to a crowded house.

Late in 1912 Doctor Fisher conceived the idea of a religious school for the Baptists in Chicago. He made the attempt with a "child of faith without endowment or donors" giving the church as headquarters for the Chicago Religious Training Seminary. Rev. Mr. Fisher was a pioneer in this field, but he knew full well that he had instituted a system that must prevail even in Chicago if churches were to do more effective work. This conclusion was not a mere notion but was the reflection of forty-nine years of service in the Baptist Church. Morehouse College conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity upon him at its 1912 commencement.

The Seminary had grown to over two hundred students. It purchased a beautiful home at 3333 Wabash Avenue. Doctor Fisher had less time to devote to the theoretical side of the



school so he began to devote all of his time to a practical ministry. He, therefore, served only as trustee. The school prospered well under President Curtwright and was day by day making bids for a permanent place among the institutions of the city. The Chicago Tribune, making an appeal for funds, states that the Seminary "has been endorsed by the Association of Commerce."

The church, school and everything he put his hand to seemed to prosper but in fellowship with other churches, in associations, state and nation conventions he did not hold aloof.

Mr. Fisher was chairman of the committee that drafted the constitution of the General Baptist State Convention of Illinois, served as one of the incorporators of this organization, and as fraternal commissioner from this body to the State Convention of Kansas, and as a member of the executive committee from his arrival in Chicago. He held no further office until the years of 1913 through 1915. Then he was elected president and served the interests of the people to the best of his ability. He was also a trustee of the Missouri Baptist State Convention and President of the Western Baptist Convention, which was representative of all the western states and territories.

In the National Baptist Convention he won for himself a most influential place. For over a decade it was considered his place to move, after the president's annual address, to go into the election of officers. Doctor E. C. Morris was thus always elected. Pastor Fisher was also a life member, member of the Executive Board, and vice-president of the National Baptist Convention, and was one of the incorporators of the



National Baptist Publishing Board, and served for ten years on every committee appointed by the Convention to determine the relations between the Board and the Convention. It is the consensus of opinion that the Convention would have split in Philadelphia in 1914, if it had not been for Mr. Fisher, and that it would not have made a blot on the escutcheon of Chicago in 1915 if he had lived.

A very delicate matter had been in litigation concerning the ownership of the National Baptist Publishing House and especially was this evident in 1914. Dr. E. W. D. Isaac, corresponding Secretary of the Baptist Young People's Union Board wrote on October 17th, "The church supply business is gone, the copyrights have passed from us. The little Negro dolls have left us. Now the denominational paper is gone. I hope you will get busy and exert yourself concerning these matters before everything that the denomination has is gone."

Much apprehension and fierce denominational strife resulted when the Publishing Board led by Dr. R. H. Boyd, so it is alleged, took all properties owned by the National Baptist Convention. A hot controversy ensued which proved helpful in correcting loose business arrangements and faulty methods that had been growing up for years and the exposure of Doctor Boyd's Board in gathering to itself that for which the people had sacrificed so nobly as they thought for themselves and the Convention. The papers were full of the matter but the pastor of Olivet thought the whole controversy could be settled in a spirit of love.

Pastor Fisher was intending to thrash out the matter at the meeting of the Convention in Chicago. He never knew, however, that his end would come in the midst of his public



brilliancy. His twelfth anniversary was his last. The message that he gave to the church at that time appeared in the Olivet Herald for January 31st, 1915:

To the Officers and Members with the Friends of Olivet:

Beloveds, it gives me great pleasure to appear before you to-day (January 26), to recount the labors of the past twelve years of my stewardship. I was not perfect and, therefore, my administration has not been perfect, but I have had a perfect pattern which was Christ Jesus after whom I have been following day and night.

We began our work together complete strangers, one not knowing the other, and, I, a Southerner, coming to you with all my southern traits and peculiarities, had to learn you and your ways. You also had to learn me and my ways. We began from the bottom with not a dime worth of anything on earth save faith in God and confidence in ourselves and agreed together to rent this basement floor for sixty-five dollars per month for two years. At the expiration of that time we arranged to purchase the building from the parties to whom the Supreme Court gave it, Charles W. Barnes of the Englewood Door and Sash Company, at a cost of twenty-eight thousand five hundred dollars, in 1905. We then let the contract for the completion of the building at a cost of seventeen thousand five hundred dollars. In order that we might be able to purchase I loaned the last cash dollar I had, which was one thousand, without one dime of interest on the same.

Our enrollment showed about six hundred names as members and to-day it shows about thirty-nine hundred. The debt of forty-six thousand dollars has been reduced to less than three thousand dollars with all expenses paid to date. We have a well organized Sabbath School with about fifty officials, a splendid Baptist Young People's Union and a Standard Literary Society among our young people that is not surpassed anywhere in this country for its real worth. We also have a Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Andrew and Peter which takes care of the membership by giving them four dollars per week in sickness and sixty dollars upon the day of their death - they have sufficient funds in the bank to-day for this purpose. We also have two missions supported by us, with seventeen other auxiliaries, making twenty-three in total. We believe in the power of organization.

When I came to you there were very few persons in the church attempting to own homes. To-day there are more than three hundred. Our church is making through its mission circles more than two hundred visits weekly among the people and is furnishing help in many cases. We have been giving more than a thousand dollars a year to missions alone and several hundred for education. Our church is divided into missionary and educational groups working the year around. We also have





training schools running day and night, reaching the needs of the people, men and women. We have three financial secretaries and one regular church clerk besides a secretary for each auxiliary. We have over fifty professional men in the church including five attorneys, eight physicians, four pharmacists, three real estate men, nine business men and others, all of whom have united with Olivet save two during my pastorate. We have performed two hundred forty-five marriages, buried two hundred persons, immersed fifteen hundred persons and our finance has not been less than ten thousand dollars annually for all purposes. To-day we have on our sick list ten members.

Sisters and Brethren, Rev. G. E. Duncan, my assistant pastor, deserves much credit for the loyal help he has rendered me in this work of the Lord. There has not been a single thing between him and me in our ten years of acquaintanceship. Let me thank you, every one separately, and then collectively, for the aid you have rendered in the work of the Lord. My entire board of twenty-three officers, save four, have united with the church since I have been your pastor.

Now, as our great National Baptist Convention with its two million five hundred thousand members is to convene with us September 10, let me urge you to leave no stone unturned for the members' comfort and happiness during their stay among us. "Arise and let us go hence." John 14:31.

Thanking you for the joy you added to my family and praying the blessing of God upon you, your homes, and your friends I beg to remain

Yours in Him,  
E. J. Fisher.

During Mr. Fisher's twelve years at Olivet there were not a score of meetings, concerts, entertainments or worshipful services in which he was not present at least a part of the time unless hindered by sickness or absence from the city. Doctor Fisher was fast breaking under incessant labors.

The thing that told most on the life of Mr. Fisher was the opposition of those men who had lived on his honesty. Some think there may have been ground for some of the opposition. Men will not submit tamely to iron-handed rule. On the other hand, human nature is so normally fallible that where men have equality of opportunity and office, if one person succeeds markedly above the other, jealousy and its scr-



quel, opposition, comes from many if for no other reason than to attract attention from their own incapacibilities.

If Doctor Fisher's ambition was to be leader of the Baptist forces in Chicago, indeed it was a laudable one, the logical result of his position as pastor of the mother church. He fought a victorious fight against all who dared usurp his prerogatives. He never was the pastor of a split and no church dared split under him. He was pastor of his church, as he said, "from the pulpit to the back door and to the grave-yard." But he would read any convention or association if he believed his views to be right and that such a course would advance God's Kingdom.

Conspiracies were formed by many to hurt the influence of Olivet, and even a "Union" was organized to pass on the eligibility of churches to receive aid from the white Baptists. This "Union" tried to eliminate him and Olivet as factors of power with white Baptists. However, the white brethren considered Olivet stronger than the combined churches of the "Union" and would follow no policy that did not include Olivet. The "Union" remained in existence two years but did not succeed. Doctor Fisher never lost a battle, but the energy used in fighting could have been conserved if men had taken time to understand him.

The work night and day was wearing Doctor Fisher out. He was constantly in demand as a revivalist and tried to fill all engagements. The controversy of the National Publishing House and the property holdings depended very largely upon his maneuvers. From the time he arrived in Chicago, Doctor Fish-



er had been actively engaged in politics. His last effort was spent at the Pekin Theater in an attempt to put Mr. Oscar De Priest over as the first Negro Alderman in Chicago and Mr. De Priest was elected. In the course of his address, he swooned; he was taken to a nearby drug store where he regained consciousness.

The news of the illness of Doctor Fisher spread like a mighty conflagration to every corner of his acquaintanceship. The Lincoln Jubilee celebrating the Half-Century Anniversary of Negro Freedom was soon to take place at Chicago and Mr. Fisher was one of the five men appointed on the commission by the Mayor of Chicago to represent the city. The president of the celebration, Bishop Fallows, wrote him on May 7th.

Dear Doctor Fisher:

I am glad to know that you are gaining rapidly every day. I am free to say that I have been sounding your praise at home and abroad as one of the most useful preachers and leaders of your race.

When I think of the past and the struggles of your early life amid the conditions in which you were placed, and the present exalted position you occupy to-day, I think we all ought to say, "What hath God wrought."

As the secretary has informed you, the final preparation for the convention cannot be done until we can have your physical co-operation. You know the tremendous importance of this work. We are therefore hoping that your recovery will be speedy and complete and that the work will go forward to a complete success.

With very best wishes, believe me,

Very sincerely yours,  
Samuel Fallows  
President.

The truth of the condition of Doctor Fisher was that others were given a hope of his speedy recovery which was not always fully shared by his family. The curtain of death which was occasionally lifted during the two and a half months



of confinement was drawing closer and closer. Elijah John Fisher died the last day of July, 1915.

Thus passed one of the rare leaders of the Baptist denomination in America. He had revitalized in twelve years what it took the former pastors a half century to accomplish, i.e., to give Olivet a permanent religious value among the churches of Chicago and the West; to make the pastor of Olivet the leader of the Baptists in Chicago and Illinois and to weld a vital relationship between the white and colored Baptists of Chicago. Doctor Fisher did more than that; he organized the church so as to take care of the ever increasing number of Negroes who were joining. He began the institutional features of the church and not only made Olivet a social and religious factor but placed it among the strong political agencies of Chicago. Mr. Fisher loved his race with all of his heart and his visions for it were not wholly in the future. On the whole, it can be said of Elijah John Fisher, D.D., L.L.D., that perhaps no Negro minister toiled harder, was opposed more, complained less and accomplished more.





## APPENDIX I

1915-1922

Elijah John Fisher's work was done but, like John Brown, "his soul goes marching on." One of the finest tributes that can be paid to his labors, is that for nearly a year after his decease the work of Olivet continued in harmony, successful and efficient as during his own life time. Even with empires the death of a monarch is sometimes the occasion for dissolution, but not so with the Olivet Church. It strengthened its position, adding over four hundred members during the year.

Undoubtedly one factor which tended to preserve the unity of the church was the faithful, untiring, and energetic work done by the late minister's daughter, Miss S. Mattie Fisher, now one of the church missionaries under appointment of the Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society. If it is not too anticipatory, it is timely to remark that the present pastor has shown a kindly interest in Dr. Fisher's family in many ways. For example, he was largely instrumental in having a monument to the memory of the late Dr. Fisher placed in Mount Forest Cemetery and favors the present monthly allowance of the church to the late minister's widow.

If a division in the church was possible, the psychological background was there in the schism which resulted in the formation of the National Baptist Convention (incorporated), led by Dr. E. C. Morris, and the National Baptist Convention (unincorporated), led by Dr. R. H. Boyd, in the annual meeting in Chicago in September, 1915. Olivet had invited the Convention to be her guest and made a great effort to enter-



tain it, but, since the only man in the denomination that could have averted a schism had passed, a division was the inevitable.

This event did not, however, stop the work of the Church so successfully managed by Chairman Griffin and his Official Board and "Father" Duncan, the devout assistant pastor, long past "three score years and ten." It rather stimulated the effort of the church to outlive the event that was unfortunate for the denomination and that put the Baptists of Chicago in an embarrassing position.

The church then liquidated every sign of debt and called the Rev. Lucy Kirk Williams, D.D., of Fort Worth, Texas, to lead her. The church at that time had over four thousand members, owning a meeting house valued at \$85,000, which was completely out of debt and operating three mission stations in needy parts of the city. Besides this, the church had eight paid workers, twenty-six departments and two hundred and sixty officers. The congregation believed, and rightly, too, that Doctor Williams could keep the Olivet machine oiled and that he had inventive genius to add more parts to the machine that Jesse F. Boulden, Richard De Baptiste, Henry Harrison White, John Francis Thomas and Elijah John Fisher had tried in various ways to perfect.

Rev. Mr. Williams was the first college and seminary trained man Olivet ever had; he was a graduate of Arkansas Baptist College with the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and of the theological course of Bishop College and honored by Selma University with the degree of Doctor of Divinity. For over twenty years he had been the successful pastor of many churches in the larger cities of Texas; he had built five



houses of worship, the last of which, the Mt. Gilead of Fort Worth, cost \$90,000. Doctor Williams also served as president of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention of Texas for twelve years. This organization had espoused the cause of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in a way similar to that of the General Missionary and Educational Convention of Georgia, mentioned in the previous Chapter, and it was expected that the pastor-elect would sustain relations between the Olivet Church and the white Baptists of Chicago. Lacy Kirk Williams was indeed the man who many hoped would also unite the Negro Baptists of Chicago.

In addition to the sad intelligence that the Baptist constituency of Chicago was estranged, one of the first things that came to the attention of Pastor Williams was the fact that Negroes were migrating to Chicago so fast that the city threatened, in a short time, to rival the Negro centers of the South. The emigration of the foreign element and the almost stoppage of immigration impaired the war industries of the North. The industries sent a call to the South for labor and Negroes seeking adventure and economic, educational, social and political advantages responded.

When Olivet saw that Negroes were coming North, and coming to stay, and that many of the poorer migrants had no idea what city life was like or who would receive them or where they would stay, she was especially active in securing homes and employment through her information and employment bureau about which many migrants had heard through an advertisement carried in the columns of one of the Negro weeklys. Hundreds of prospective migrants sent letters to "Oliver," "Olivet," or



"Olivet" for information. Some wrote for passes; others simply said "Meet me at the station." One wanted "a suitcase to put his things in." The following letter from Hawkinsville, Georgia, tells another pathetic story:

March 26 - 1917.

My Dear friends I have seen yur in Striction of members of the race coming from the South. We will preceide yu offer in coming north. We all are not able to come but our desire is to come. Heep of us ant, ot the money to come with. Some of the peope of the race are unable to go they kneed help to come. We wants to come. We think yu peope for help. We are Poor class of Peope and want help to come with and think yu all Please to help we poor class of the race if we can get off as Soon as we can get off for times is getting bad hear we wants to leve hear befor we cant leve So give my love to all howdy and Good Bye Just a friend rite soon as possible to

Scores of these migrants united with the Olivet Church each Sunday. Other churches were strengthened too; the membership of five churches increased to nearly five thousand, but the phenomenal increase of Olivet was the direct result of her wide popularity and the preparation of her pastor and members for the incoming thousands.

The increase of the Olivet membership was so large that the main auditorium seating about eighteen hundred, the lecture room holding about eight hundred more and the Dearborn Street Annex which had been used for a kitchen and dining room were all used for worship and yet there were hundreds turned away. Another building opposite the church on Twenty-seventh Street was secured to be used as a kitchen and dining room and the two upper stories fitted up for a Working Men's Home.

It was evident that Olivet needed more room. When the First Baptist Church desired to sell her meeting house, Olivet was asked to buy the property. True enough the building would





provide accomodation for about three thousand persons,<sup>1</sup> but Pastor Williams was not anxious to take over the property. The church even voted not to buy it. It was the ambition of Doctor Williams to build a tabernacle in Chicago and as a result he proposed to the Baptist Executive Council of Chicago that if some of the smaller congregations would unite and take over the property Olivet would contribute \$3,000 to the same. The reply was that no arrangements could be agreed upon with any Negro Baptist organization except Olivet. Whereupon, the church voted to buy the property for \$85,000, the price offered by a Methodist organization. The Baptist Executive Council gave the church \$15,000 of the amount. This act of Olivet and her pastor put the Baptists far in the lead of any other denomination in Chicago, set a widely copied precedent for the buying of church property, re-opened relations between the white and colored Baptists of Chicago and virtually vindicated the position of the late pastor in respect to the "Union" mentioned in the previous chapter.

The second Sunday in September, 1918, was the day the First Church was turned over to the Olivet congregation. It was an unforgettable day when the membership met in the old church home, formed a line of march that paraded out State St. to Thirty-first Street and thence East to South Park Avenue, singing as they went, "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

The gray stone building, with its gothic towers, one rising one hundred and sixty feet, its sides divided with but-

1 The First Church edifice was designed by architects Wilcox and Miller to seat in the main auditorium, 1,500, in the Sunday School Room, 900 and in the lecture room, 530. The Standard, October 29, 1874.



tresses and large stained and cut glass windows made the most pretentious Baptist meeting house then in the city. Its gallery amphitheater and semicircular black walnut pews with incised holly panels and tops and arms veneered with root ash were just part of the interior arrangements which made the total initial cost of the building \$111,000. Now the hope of that grand, historic building were turned over to Olivet. But Olivet had been in the minds of the people that worshipped there ever since the building of the edifice. At the laying of the corner stone, Saturday afternoon, June 5, 1875, the pastor of Olivet, the Rev. Richard De Baptista, made a short address along with other city ministers. Furthermore, Dr. W. W. Everts, pastor of the First Church, spoke wiser than he knew at the dedication in April, 1876, when he preached from Genesis 35:3: "And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." Nor did the evening message of the Rev. J. M. Murdock, D.D., of Boston, fall short of the program of world vision of the First Church or of Olivet when he used Psalm 67:1, 2 as a text saying: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations."

Olivet, from the first, accepted the earthly challenge of the modern message. In order to know the needs of the field, a religious survey, extending over several months, was begun. The worker would enter each home with the statement:

"We are making a survey of the district in order to find our people because we wish to establish for them a community center in the church at Thirty-first Street and South Park



Avenue. In the interest of the work we are making a house to house visit to all the people of the community asking the names of the adults in the house, their Christian connection, their occupation, how long they have been in the city, the number, ages and sex of their children. In this center we have a binder written, information and free employment bureau, clubs for boys and girls, meetings for mothers and fathers and many other helpful organizations. Will you give us this information?"

In this way over five thousand homes were reached and direct contact between the church and community was made vital. From such a survey it is easy to see how in four years, 62,000 visits were made to sick and needy persons and 986 of them aided.

In patriotic effort Olivet was no less responsive. She paid \$5,000 cash for Liberty Bonds to the second series. More than one thousand of her members subscribed for Liberty Bonds of the third series. Moreover, Pastor Williams was given an indefinite leave of absence for religious work in Camp Grant. The church was open at all times as a war center, encouraging patriotic addresses and exercises, entertaining soldiers, and housing the Red Cross Committee. Olivet donated thousands of pieces of religious literature to soldiers at Camp Grant and Dodge and a communion set to the latter training station.

As the Olivet Church contributed her share in making the war successful, so the war inspired her to do big tasks. For example, in the course of four years, the total collected and spent for community service, church improvement, education, evangelism and missions amounted to \$141,322.36. The great-



est financial feat accomplished by any group aggregation of color was staged on August 29, 1920, at which time over \$12,000 in cash was laid on the table, making a financial effort of only a few weeks total more than \$25,000. This was accomplished through the wise judgment of Pastor Williams who took advantage of the high labor returns knowing that Negroes contribute seventy-five percent more of their wealth for church purposes than does any other race.

During the Chicago riot, the Olivet Baptist Church was the headquarters of the Peace and Protective Association - an organization composed of the leading Negro citizenry - which met daily for thirty or forty days, counseling sanity and peace and giving defense and aid to needy and innocent riot victims. Thus it is evident that Mr. Williams did not only talk of the golden streets of by and by but of the dirty, crooked highways and byways of now and here.

The divine worship of the church is not neglected; every Lord's day at eleven o'clock in the morning preaching services are held in the main auditorium, the Sunday School room and the lecture room of the church. Rev. Mr. Williams is himself a thoughtful, forceful, orthodox, interesting and emotional preacher. In one sermon, he satisfies the intellectual elite he convinces the skeptic and he electrifies the washer woman. An extract of his sermon on the "Quest of God" (Genesis 32:29) will serve to illustrate his style:

Philosophers have given much thought to the study of God, and after their searches and researches many gave Him the name of First Cause, the Great Unknown.

Homer called Him Zeus, having His permanent abode in Mt. Olympus, which trembled when he stomped His feet or nodded His head. The Romans called Him Jupiter, Venus and Mercury, and ascribed to these gods the powers and some of the attributes





that we ascribe to our God. The Northerners called Him Odin and Thor; the Egyptians, Isis and Osiris, or Tiphon, while other nations gave Him other names. Abraham, David and Moses, when they first saw Him, called Him a Man, for they saw Him walking and talking, or striving with them as men would with men. When He commanded Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to let His people go, Moses inquired what was his name, for he knew that would be the first question Pharaoh and the children of Israel would ask. And to Moses He said, tell them my name is, "I AM." A personal, self existing Being! ....

Tell me thy name, thou that fillest all space, inhabitest the sea, dwellest in the loneliness of the mountains, soarest up the heaven and keepest vigil in hell. .... Thou that knowest all, and hast the wisdom of the deep, of the blinking stars, and blinding suns, of rocks and rivers, landscapes and grottoes, I want to know thy name. Thou that has power so that none can hinder thee, so that none can prevail against thee, so that thou askest none for bread, or what course thou wilt pursue; thou that findest the cause and power of thy existence within thyself, that rulest all, that hast never failed in any engagement, nor art tired in any undertaking - "Tell me, I pray, thy name." .... Thou, the secret and nameless One of existence, the Source of my fears, the Object of my hopes and faith, the Inspiration of my life, the One animating and indescribable impulse within me, I hear thy voice when I am alone and in the dark; when none else is there, thou art. I feel thy touch, I have received thy aid, when my own limitations have failed me, when my resources are exhausted, when I need protection in the crucial moments of my life, when I stand face to face with emergencies, when I have felt insecure, and tormenting fears have crept over me, when the attributes of the flesh offer and hold no comfort for me - tell me who art thou that comest with the gentleness of the dew and the power of a God and rescueth me?

It is putting the fact conservatively to state that about thirty-five hundred people throng to hear this preacher each Sunday and yet hundreds of the members in go to other churches because they cannot gain admittance at their own. Since 1916 seventeen hundred and ninety-seven persons have been added to the church by baptism. In the fall of 1918, a great revival was held at which time the Rev. S. E. J. Watson, D.D., of Topeka, Kansas, but now of the Pilgrim Baptist Church, Chicago, was the preacher. More than eight hundred souls were added to the church. The same year, the number of persons received by Christian experience, letter and baptism was twenty-six



hundred and seventy. At this writing, approximately one out of every fifteen Negro residents of Chicago is a member of the Olivet Baptist Church; the enrollment is ten thousand and twelve, a group as large as the combined constituency of the ten leading churches of the Chicago Baptist Association.

The Sunday School has thirty-one hundred pupils enrolled. In addition there is a childrens' church which meets each Sunday morning.

All of the work has been accomplished by Pastor Williams and his assistants - the Rev. George Duken until he died, March 11, 1918; the Rev. Joseph H. Bramham, his successor, a good preacher and mixer, a great associate, the Rev. Joseph C. Carroll and three or four ministerial students from the University of Chicago. There are in all, thirty compensated workers and eight hundred and sixty church and departmental officers in charge of fifty-five departments.

The church owns a lot at Thirty-eighth Street and Prairie Avenue, now used for athletics and summer chauteaugas, an automobile bus, costing \$2,600, which brings children to and from the Kindergarten, old and decrepit members to worship and gives recreational rides to needy convalescent members, soldiers and others. The Day Nursery and Working Girls' Home, located at 3144-3146 Vernon Avenue, cost \$8,250 without equipment. The total property valuation is estimated at \$200,000; the income for last year was \$89,000.

The Olivet Baptist Church is a reminder of the capacity of the Negro and a timely rebuttal of the statement that Negroes are incapable of self-government. The white Baptists of the North have not failed to recognize the ability of Doctor Williams nor to accept the leading position of the Olivet



Church. On several occasions, Pastor Williams, himself a keen student of the relation of the races, has been asked to speak before white groups. With much ability he has lectured at numerous churches, and before the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, the Illinois Baptist State Convention and the Northern Baptist Convention. His church takes delight in permitting him to serve in this capacity as well as in leading his influence to needy places of the race. He has recently conducted successful revivals in St. Louis, Kansas City, Peoria and Omaha. In the last named place, the influence of Olivet is so great that Pastor Botts of the large First Church, designed his meeting house after the Olivet structure. As a matter of fact, throughout all of the Northern territory, from the many struggling churches in Chicago, which Olivet has helped, to the outstanding congregations in the Northwest, there is hardly a place where the influence of Olivet has not permeated.

It is not to be wondered at that, in a position so conspicuous and with a reputation so far reaching, Doctor Williams has much opposition. Yet he remains unperturbed though very sensitive to accumulating criticism and hostility which is chiefly political.

Unlike his predecessor, Dr. Williams tries not to be partisan or to ally himself with any political faction. It is hard at this period of political history to determine with what faction the former pastor would ally himself. We know, however, that his last efforts were spent in support of Mr. De Priest for alderman under the ticket vouchered for by the Honorable William Hale Thompson, Mayor of Chicago. Doctor Wil-



Williams has never attended a political meeting and it is not certain that he is a party to any faction. Because of this attitude, a newspaper which many believe is supported by the "organization" attacked him and his church. The prime motive for these attacks is to increase the circulation of the paper and to "bring into line" the Olivet Church which has too much influence, they say, not to be controlled by any one faction.

Then there is another yellow journal, whose editor, a candidate for the United States Congress, felt slighted that he was not invited to speak at the obsequies of the church held in the summer of 1919. His animus was further kindled by the fact that Doctor Williams advocated Negroes joining, where possible, the unions of organized labor in preference to the one of the "would be congressmen" which, in addition to other things, could in no way keep down race friction.

It does seem that since Dr. Williams is not for the Thompson machine in its entirety, nor for Parkerism, he is sympathetic with the faction in which Ex-governor Lowden played so conspicuous a part. Probably not because of this altogether but on account of the ability of Mr. Williams as a leader of men, he was named by the Governor a member of the Race Commission during the riot that occurred in Chicago.

Whatever may be said concerning the opposition that tried hard to estrange the people that met at the two houses of worship, Doctor Williams proved the master of the situation. Afterwards the church sold the meeting house at Twenty-seventh and Dearborn Streets to the Liberty Baptist Church of which the Rev. D. W. Bowen is pastor. Another result of the opposition is that it strengthened the church and solidified it for work as a religious, political and social organism.





The hurtful influences both political and religious would not be content with this divided victory. They wanted to wreck the institution completely but failed to realize that they were attacking a great church and a man as formidable as any of them dared to be.

Nor did many of the churches of Chicago consider the contribution, moral and financial, of the Olivet people to the Bethlehem Association. In 1919, all of the forty-seven churches gave \$1909 for State Missions and Olivet contributed \$1861.14 of this amount. Of the total benevolences of \$6450.44, Olivet gave \$6046.08.<sup>1</sup>

Already a group of struggling churches was disgruntled because they thought that they could not get the desired encouragement from the three associations<sup>2</sup> in Chicago. The New Era Baptist Association was formed of thirty churches<sup>3</sup>; Olivet joined it. At the first annual session of this body, held at the Olivet Church, May 10-16, 1922, it reported over \$1500 raised during the year.

A few of the members of the Olivet Church, however, were not convinced that withdrawing from the Bethlehem Association was the way to correct the glaring evils in the ranks of the Negro Baptists of Chicago. And when one of the assistant pastors of the church, the Rev. Howard E. Hawkins, resigned, some of this group went with him to the old Ebenezer meeting house, 35th and Dearborn Streets, where they, irregularly, it

1 Minutes Illinois Baptist State Convention, 1920, pp. 156f.

2 The North Wood River (1909), the Bethlehem (1909), and the Union (1917) Baptist Associations.

3 Minutes Illinois Baptist State Convention, 1921, pp. 152ff.



is alleged, set up another Baptist Church.<sup>1</sup> Though the church claims to have two hundred and forty-two members, to May 14, 1922, after an existence of only five weeks, it is unfortunate that another Negro Baptist institution should be added to the already one hundred and three,<sup>2</sup> struggling for the most part, churches of the city.

Still the Olivet Church is none the worse off numerically for this political and religious unrest. Her position has only been strengthened. In a protracted meeting of ten days ending May 7, 1922, 407 were received; 104 by baptism.

In spite of this, the church is making some splendid accomplishments because of financial aid coming from sympathetic friends. The Elizabeth Mc Cormick Memorial Fund is furnishing help to develop a free clinic for the undeveloped children of the kindergarten and day nursery. The local Red Cross provides two nurses who give regular instruction to classes in nutrition and in the home care of the sick. A certificate is given to those who successfully complete the course. About \$18,000 in cash has been contributed by the Baptists, not counting the salaries of the head of the kindergarten and of two of the three church missionaries which are paid by the Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society. Members of this society, of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, together with the city ministers meet, in an advisory board, with Doctor Williams and his workers to plan the activities of this great institutional church. The following is the weekly program of the church:

- 1 The Chicago Baptist Blade, April, 1922.
- 2 The Watchman-Examiner, March 9, 1922.



- Sunday
- 6:30 A.M. Sunrise prayer meeting  
 9:30 Sunday School  
 10:30 Morning Worship; preaching in three places  
 11:50 Childrens' Church  
 12:00 P.M. Loyal Temperance Legion  
 Lord's Supper each first Sunday  
 3:30 Missionary program each fourth Sunday  
 Missionary program of the Junior Society each fifth Sunday  
 Standard Literary Society  
 5:00 Herald of Cabinet Meeting  
 Junior B.Y.P.U.  
 6:00 Senior B.Y.P.U.  
 7:45 Evening Worship  
 8:30 Ordinance of Baptism each first Sunday.
- Monday
- 2:00 P.M. Junior Missionary Society  
 Senior Missionary Society  
 8:00 Social Service Committee  
 Young Ladies' Cosmopolitan League  
 Ministers' and Christian Workers' Bible School.
- Tuesday
- 7:00 P.M. Boy Scouts  
 7:30 Young Men's Social Unit, second and fourth Tuesdays  
 7:45 Girls' Community Guild  
 Day Nursery and Community Club, first and third Tuesdays  
 Woman's Christian Temperance Union, first and third Tuesdays  
 Sisterhood, second and fourth Tuesdays  
 Brotherhood, second and fourth Tuesdays  
 8:00 Ministers' and Christian Workers' Bible School,  
 Tuesday before the fourth Sunday.
- Wednesday
- 7:30 P.M. Circle Meetings - The Pastor's Aid, Wide Awake, Calvary, Queen Mother, Galilee, Helping Hand, Metropolitan, Olivet, Progressive, Providence Royal, Good Will, Willing Workers, and Victory Circles.
- Thursday
- 10:00 A.M. Missionary Art and Needle Craft  
 2:00 P.M. Community Mother's Meeting  
 7:30 Prayer Meeting.
- Friday
- 7:30 P.M. Sunday School Teachers' Meeting.  
 7:30 Choral Class Rehearsal  
 8:30 Sunday School Teachers' Training Class and Bible School  
 Young Men's Baraca Class  
 Overflow choir rehearsal



		Saturday
2:00	P.M.	Industrial Institute
7:30		Choir rehearsal

There are other activities which fill out most of the week days and sometimes extend into the evenings. The kindergarten is operated every morning except Saturday and Sunday, the health bureau, day nursery and information and free labor bureau every day until evening and the public library is open until nine o'clock in the evening. Each summer a Daily Vacation Bible School is conducted. In 1920 there were six hundred children enrolled including French, Jews, Italian, Irish, Cuban, West Indian and Negro boys and girls. When unemployment was at its height Olivet fed eight hundred, gave free beds to three hundred and eighty, free baths to three hundred and sixteen and served nineteen thousand meals. This is the institution that again entertained the National Baptist Convention in September of last year.

Truly Olivet is a beehive of Christian activity, the largest Protestant church in America. Donation and means need to be forthcoming if Olivet is to accomplish the task for which many are persuaded to believe God has called her - donations of clothing for the poor and materials for properly maintaining the day nursery, means for the liquidation of the debt on all the church property, means for more paid workers in the kindergarten, day nursery, industrial enterprises, means to direct the play life of boys and girls, means to expand the vision of young men and young women, means to spread the gospel. For, if among the gayly colored ramparts of religious endeavor is to stand there the sign by which an conquer, it must be placed there by the same agencies and means by which the lesser forces for right and righteousness triumph





- paid workers.

The past has flown with its sacrifice, its indelible leader, Elijah John Fisher; the present is held with L. J. L. C., Lacey Kirk Williams. What the future holds we know not, but one thing is certain - the denomination will suffer unless there is a common bond of union between the institutions in Chicago. As the dream of Fisher was realized when the Negro Baptists of the North came together, February 15, 1922, and voted to take over the property of the Baptist Missionary Training School of Chicago and operate another school, so let us hope that the most useful minister of color in all the world, Lacey Kirk Williams, will unite the latent forces in Chicago to hasten the Kingdom of the Lord.



## APPENDIX

## A

Whereas, The emigration en masse of the free colored people of the United States to some other country, is now being agitated and advocated by some of our leading minds, who seem to regard this movement as the only true line of policy calculated to improve our political condition, and

Whereas, this question involves two important considerations, namely: whether emigration would benefit, not only the free people of color, but the slave as well; and whereas, the pertinency and importance of these questions are justly entitled to be fairly and squarely met, fully discussed and finally decided as to whether we should adopt this policy as best calculated to promote the general welfare of all concerned; and whereas, in view of the circumstances of the case, we, the colored citizens of Chicago, oppose this scheme for the following reasons:

1st. Because we believe nature had not prescribed any particular locality on this broad and beautiful earth for the special benefit and peculiar privilege of any one class to the entire exclusion of all others, not merely Anglo-Saxon, consequently in this important regard, all men have a natural right to live where it may seem best to them.

2d. Because this scheme would have a tendency to foster pro-slavery prejudice, unsettle and distract the colored people.

3d. Especially do we regard it as impolitic at this time as it affords our political enemies an opportunity of seizing on this as a fit one, out of which to manufacture political capital.

4th. Because we think it would tend to revive the old Colonization scheme, against which we have long since protested.

5th. Above all we do oppose it, because we have no certain apprehension that it would actually benefit even the 600,000 free people of color, far less the 4,000,000 slaves who are not permitted to act for themselves.

6th. Because we believe we could be more likely to promote the general welfare of both free and slave by uniting our industry, capital and skill, right here and in our native country, and continue to labor and wait, therefore,

Resolved, That as we have been with this people from the beginning, we intend to remain with them to the end; for we have already planted our trees in the American soil, and by the help of God, we mean to remove under the shade thereof.



## B

To the American Baptist Free Mission Society, organized in the Second African Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia.

Dear Brethren: It had been a cherished desire of mine to meet with you at your present anniversary.

The principles you advocate, and for which you have endured much persecution through the twenty-five and over, long years of your distinctive organization, have attracted me to you in feelings of sympathy and co-operation.

It was, therefore, very agreeable to my wishes when the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention, of which I have the honor to be the president, at the annual meeting held in Savannah, Ga., in August, 1868, appointed me to represent them in your present meeting.

It is a great disappointment to me, that events, which I could not control, have so worked as to prevent me from meeting with you to shake your hand in token of Christian affection and encouragement. However, I take this means of expressing to you the Christian feelings and the greetings of friendship and co-operation which I am authorized to bear from the A.A.B.M. Convention to the A.B.F.M. Society.

The work that spreads out before us is most stupendous in its magnitude, and sublimely grand in the results aimed at in its accomplishment.

The accumulated degradation and superstition of centuries of enforced ignorance rest like a mighty pall upon my millions of souls in this Christian land! For these souls, Christ has died; for these benighted minds, God has revealed the very light of heaven. This light shines out from the pages of God's word, and is embodied in the enlightening and sanctifying truths of the Gospel of the Son of God. To carry this knowledge to these souls, and make it part of their actual possessions; to lift them up to the dignity of enlightened manhood; to give them the status of intelligent and cultivated Christians, is the great work, that invites our energies; and this work we must be doing. The command, "Go work to-day in my vineyard," is binding here. In this work we are "laborers together with God."

In our organization we are separate, but we are one in the great principle of an anti-caste Gospel for all the people of the earth; since God "hath made of one blood all nations of men," and proposes to all, upon the same terms, for their acceptance, "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism."

The harmony and kind co-operation which have been maintained between us during the past year I hope to see continued in the same spirit that loved you last anniversary meeting to propose, and us to accept, the bond of union that has brought us more closely together.

We shall, upon our part, recognize any expression or action that shall continue and strengthen that unity of spirit



and bond of peace between us.

May the Holy Spirit be present in your meeting, and His power be felt in all your heart, giving animation and tone to your speech and action, is my earnest prayer.

Yours in the bonds of the Gospel

Richard De Baptiste,  
President, C. A. B. M. Con.

Chicago, May 11, 1869.

Minutes American Baptist Free Mission Society, 1869, pp. 187.

C

Whereas, The Conference of Baptist Ministers of this city at its regular session, held in the Grand Pacific Hotel on Monday, June 28, 1883, entertained, as its honored guest, Prof M. H. Ensley, of Howard University, Washington, D.C.; and

Whereas, Rev. E. O. Taylor, pastor of the Central Church, of this city, at the close of the session, extended to him the common courtesy of an invitation to lunch; and,

Whereas, Race Bros., whose restaurant they sought, refused to entertain or feed Prof. Ensley on the ground of his color; therefore

Resolved, That we hereby express through the press of this city our righteous indignation at the indignity put upon us in such vile and discourteous treatment of our guest and brother.

Resolved, That we are ashamed and humiliated that in the great metropolis of the Northwest a man who is unquestionably a Christian, a gentleman and a scholar, occupying a position of honor and trust should, as one unfit to eat, be refused food in a public eating-house because the skin under which his blood beats is dark instead of light.

Resolved, That as the Bible declares that God, " hath made of one blood all nations of men" and the constitutional amendment declares the legal equality of all we do protest against this outrage as an infraction of law and morals.

On behalf of the Chicago Baptist Ministers' Conference.

W.P. Hudson,  
F.G. Thiele,  
C.K. Colver.

The Standard, July 12, 1883.





# D PASTORS

## Zoar Baptist Church

1853-  
1855-1858 Rev. H. W. Hopkins  
1858 Rev. David G. Lett

Mount Zion Baptist Church

Zoar Baptist Church

1860 Rev. J. F. Boulden

Rev. Mr. Trevelly (?)

## Olivet Baptist Church

1861-1863 Rev. Jesse T. Boulden  
1863-1882 Rev. Richard De Baptiste  
1882-1883 Rev. James Alfred Dunn Podd  
1883-1886 Rev. Henry Harrison White  
1887-1903 Rev. John Francis Thomas, D.D.  
1903-1915 Rev. Elijah John Fisher, D.D., L.L.D.  
1915 Rev. Lacey Kirk Williams, A.P., D.D.

# E

## CHURCH CLERKS

1856- William Johnson of the Zoar Church  
1861- J. James of the Mt. Zion Church  
1862-1863 William Hiram of the Olivet Church  
1864- George Kebly  
1865 George Kebly  
James C. Corey  
1866 William H. Smith  
1868 J. Shipton  
1869-1870 William H. Smith  
1871-1873 J. W. E(G?) Thomas  
1875- William C. Phillips  
1876 J. W. E. Thomas  
1877-1879 William C. Phillips  
1880 Hannibal Trent  
1881 William C. Phillips  
1882 L. Washington  
1883-1884 Woodson L. Simpson, M.D.  
1885-1886 D. C. Smith  
1887 William R. Johnson  
1888-1891  
1892 J. C. Elliott



1893-1899	
1900	J. L. E. Perry
1902-1903	Percy Trickett
1904-	E. W. Edwards
1905-1905	F. W. Stevens
1907-	Richard A. Williams
1908-1912	Thomas T. Bowman
1912-1915	Prince A. Glanton
1915	B. C. Dewberry
1916-1921	P. A. Glanton
1921-	Irvin Clark

## F

## SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

1864	James Reeves
1866	Richard De Baptiste
	William S. Johnson, Assistant
1869	Richard De Baptiste
1870	Dr. J. H. Smith
1871	Dr. J. H. Smith
	W. C. Phillips
1873	J. W. E. Thomas
1875	William C. Phillips
1878	D. B. Peyton
1879	W. Simpson
1880	W. R. Johnson
1881	D. B. Peyton
1882	W. C. Phillips
1883	Frank W. Rollins
1885	William S. Johnson
1887	Frank W. Rollins
1888-1903	
1903-1922	Frank W. Taylor
1922	



G  
STATISTICS

CHURCH			S. S.		FINANCIAL			
Date	Baptized	Disinherited	Total membership	Teachers	Scholars	Volumes in Library	Amount Collected	Value of Property
Zear								
1853			11					
1854	2		19					
1856	4		56					
1857	5	24	57					5000
1859		17	73					
1860	11	18	90					
Mt. Zion								
1861	5		66					
Olivet								
1862	3	2	132	8	30	126		
1864	59	14	226	10	90	150		
1865	29	16	257					
1866	85	25	359	11	135		\$3163.23	
1868	42	35	480				\$405.70	18041
1869	14	78	432		138		\$442.98	
1870	14	31	443		160	400	\$500.33	
1871	81	26	547		212		\$542.	
1872	27	29	589				\$680.97	
1873	23	31	603	26	319		\$370.18	
1874	17	18	633					
1875	3	29	618		370			16000
1876	8	15	621		230		\$522.27	
1877	79	37	701		206		\$634.22	
1878	8	45	671				\$939.17	
1879	3	27	672		150	646	\$787.31	
1880	10	157	537				\$349.44	
1881	28	16	578		124		\$668.70	
1882	8	5	600.		127	243	\$7140.55	
1883	12	58	595	24	200		\$790.	
1884	29	10	720				\$362.54	
1885	14	8	819	17			\$267.78	
1886	25	15	887		107		\$659.39	
1887	63	23	1248	15	190		\$119.66	
1839	15		1361					
1891	39		1481					
1895	19		1297					75000
1897	58		1485					
1901	48		843		427			7000



1902	85	1550	750		15,000
1903		600			
1906	150	2194	430	8080	65,000
1909	233	3000		12000	65,000
1913	200	3600			
1915		3900	50 900		
1916	105	4271			
1917	238	6840		\$26156	
1918	318	7468		84570	785,000
1919	480	8430		48347	
1920	208	9069		64478	
1921	369	10012	3100	73005	180,000

This table is compiled from the Minutes of the Wood River Baptist Association, the Fox River Baptist Association, the Bethlehem Baptist Association, the Baptist General State Convention and the church reports. Many discrepancies arise because of the different reports handed in at different times.





POOR PRINT IN ORIGINAL









## DATE DUE

	SEP 07 '98	
UIC REC'D JUN 09 '00		
UIC REC'D NOV 07 '01		
UIC REC'D JUL 17 2004	AUG 2 8A	
UIC Rec'd AUG 6 4 2005		
LORD		PRINTED IN U.S.A.









DATE DUE

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